



Walter F. Shyherd MD FACS  
Third Auxiliary Surgical Group



# **FRONT LINE SURGEONS**

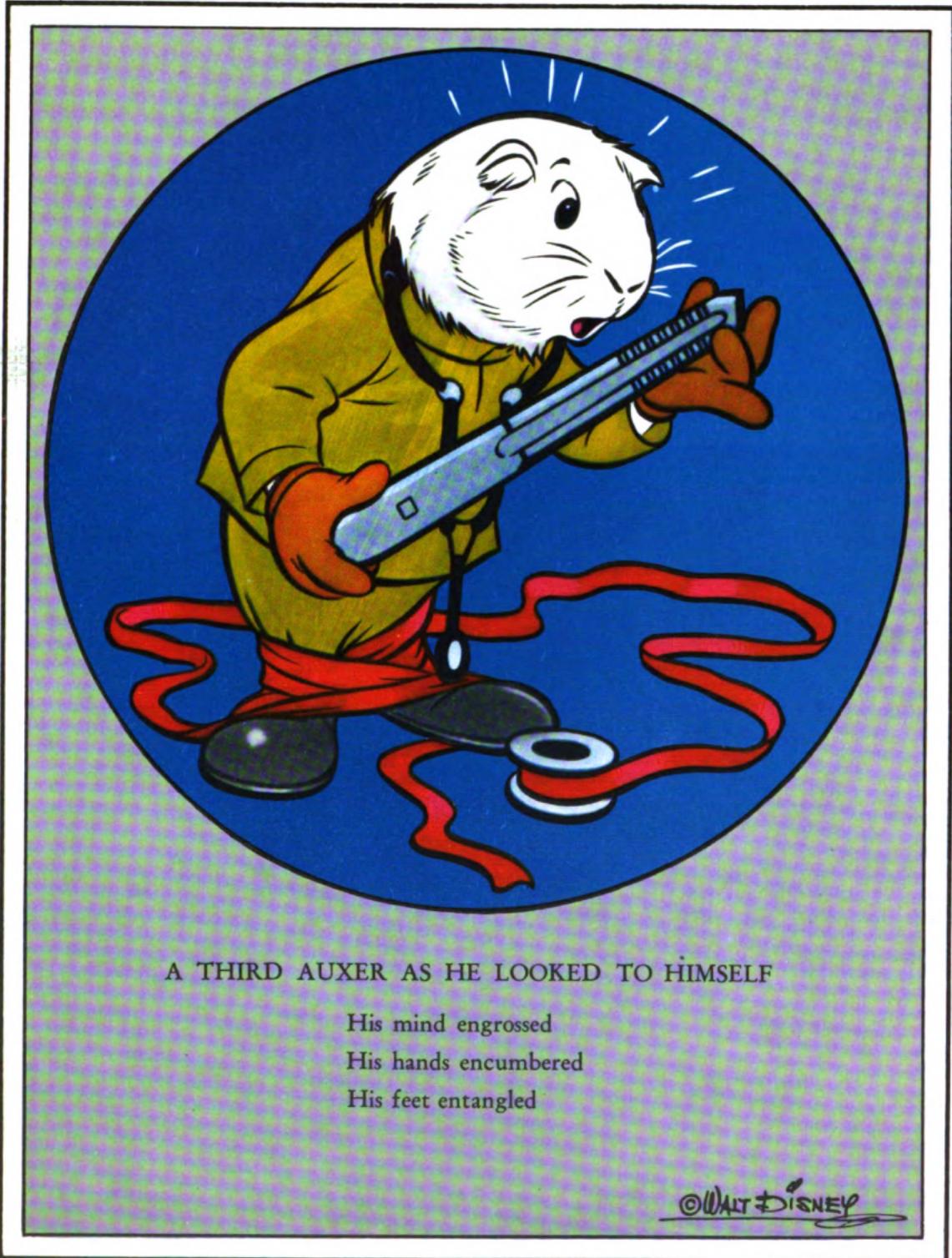
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Original from  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN







A THIRD AUXER AS HE LOOKED TO HIMSELF

His mind engrossed  
His hands encumbered  
His feet entangled

©WALT DISNEY

# **FRONT LINE SURGEONS**



**A History of  
The Third Auxiliary  
Surgical Group**

**By CLIFFORD L. GRAVES, M.D.**



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*To All the Men and Women  
Who Helped to Make*

THE THIRD AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP

*a stout-hearted  
high-spirited  
red-blooded outfit*



## PREFACE

**T**HIS book came very close to not being written.

The idea for it came to me in the very beginning, when the Third Aux was still floundering at Fort Sam Houston. My preliminary notes quickly grew into a regular diary and this in turn became the "little black book" that my friends were always so curious about. Overseas I had a good opportunity to continue my work as historian because I was entrusted with the task of preparing the annual reports. From time to time I interviewed the men who had distinguished themselves. Gradually the material grew and when the war was over, it filled a good-sized box.

That box became my undoing. Carrying it was out of the question. It had to be mailed home. Uneasily I put my address on it and took it to the mail clerk. That was the last I ever saw of it. For two hectic months I chased from one post office to another, trying to retrieve my property. It was to no avail. The Army had played me one last trick.

At home I immediately set the wheels in motion to recover what I could. I wrote to every Third Auxer. I went to Washington and spent a month in the office of the Surgeon General. I interviewed every Third Auxer I could reach during a time when I crossed the continent a dozen times. I saw men in New York and Los Angeles, in Portland and Miami, and many places in between. Slowly the material began to reaccumulate. All this took a year.

Then came a period during which I was so busy establishing myself in the practice of medicine that I could give no thought to the book. This lasted two years. At the end of that time I reviewed my position and decided that I could not quit. The story of the Third Aux simply had to be written.

Help came in the form of a trusted friend, Miss June Case. I dictated and she transcribed. The first draft took a whole year. As I progressed, I realized that my information was not everywhere complete. I needed fill-in from widely scattered members of the Group. Many of these had dropped out of sight. This led to an extensive correspondence with dozens of Third Auxers, all of whom I hereby thank for their enthusiastic cooperation. Revision started. Some sections had to

be re-written. Others were discarded. Out of this came the second draft and finally the third. Miss Case never gave up. If it had not been for her constant encouragement, I would have faltered long ago.

My approach to the subject has been both objective and subjective. The Third Aux unfolds itself in these pages exactly as it unfolded itself to the men who belonged to it. Yet, it also appears in its proper historical perspective. Background facts are described in non-technical language. The reader witnesses the entire travail from beginning to end, without ever being out of touch with the larger scheme. He is introduced to the Third Aux in its embryo stage at Fort Sam Houston and he follows it through the vicissitudes in England, the gropings in North Africa, the experiment in Sicily, and finally to the culmination in Normandy and beyond. In this way he sees the whole story from every angle. It is a human story and it is a story of great achievements. I am proud to record it here.

Individuals in this narrative are identified by name and by their rank at the time they appear on the scene, rather than by their rank at the time of discharge from the Army. In a story so discursive, it was impossible to mention everyone individually. The Third Aux had many heroes who go unsung. Let the reader remember that for every exploit here described, a dozen hover in the background.

This book is being published in an edition of approximately two hundred and twenty-five copies. The entire project has been financed by members of the Group. In spite of the high price of this limited edition, the response has been beyond expectation. Many men have bought gift copies. Without this support, this book would not have been possible.

The photographs come from many sources. The Army Signal Corps is responsible for most of them. Life magazine contributed a certain number free of charge. Third Auxers sent in a good many. A few were supplied by the Navy, the Air Force, Acme Newspictures, and professional studios in England. The sketches are by Gordon Dodds and the painting by Alfred Sensenbach. The Walt Disney organization designed the official emblem of the Third Aux. Kleinbardt's work has been lost.

And so this book goes to press. May it contribute in some small measure to a better understanding of the work of the surgeons in the Second World War and to the glory of that great outfit, the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group.

San Diego, California  
August 1950

Clifford L. Graves.

# IMPORTANT DATES

5 May 1942 ..... Third Aux activated at Fort Sam Houston.  
Lieutenant Colonel J. Fred Blatt assumes command.

27 November 1942 ..... Third Aux leaves Fort Sam Houston.

15 December 1942 ..... Third Aux arrives in England.

5 February 1943 ..... Colonel J. Fred Blatt takes half the Third Aux to North Africa. Major Clifford L. Graves assumes command in England.

16 February 1943 ..... Half the Third Aux arrives in North Africa.

16 March 1943 ..... First teams leave for the front.

12 May 1943 ..... End of Tunisian campaign.

10 July 1943 ..... D Day in Sicily.

17 August 1943 ..... End of Sicilian campaign.

11 November 1943 ..... Departure from Palermo, Sicily.

27 November 1943 ..... Arrival in England.

22 December 1943 ..... Reunion at Bewdley Camp.

21 February 1944 ..... Lieutenant Colonel Elmer A. Lodmell assumes command.

6 June 1944 ..... D Day in Normandy.

24 July 1944 ..... Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Crisler, Jr. assumes command.

8 May 1945 ..... V-E Day.

12 May 1945 ..... Lieutenant Colonel Stephen J. Karpenski assumes command.

31 July 1945 ..... Third Aux becomes 896th Professional Medical Services.

12 October 1945 ..... 896th Professional Medical Services inactivated.



#### THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE PLAQUE

For superior performance of duty  
in the accomplishment of excep-  
tionally difficult tasks during the  
period from 1 May 1944 to  
31 July 1944

## DECORATIONS AND INSIGNIA



The Silver Star



Legion of Merit



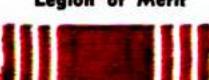
The Bronze Star



The Purple Heart



The Distinguished  
Unit Badge



Good Conduct Ribbon



American Theatre Ribbon



European Theater Ribbon  
with seven campaign  
stars and arrowhead



Victory Ribbon



Croix de Guerre



Services of Supply



First Army



Provisional Engineer  
Special Brigade



101st Airborne Division



82nd Airborne Division

# STATION LIST

5 May 1942-27 Nov. 1942.....	<b>Fort Sam Houston</b>
27 Nov. 1942-30 Nov. 1942.....	<b>En route</b>
30 Nov. 1942- 7 Dec. 1942.....	<b>Camp Kilmer</b>
7 Dec. 1942-15 Dec. 1942.....	<b>En route</b>
16 Dec. 1942- 5 Feb. 1943.....	<b>Oxford, England</b>

5 Feb. 1943-15 Feb. 1943.....	<b>En route</b>	5 Feb. 1943-27 March 1943.....	<b>Oxford, England</b>
16 Feb. 1943- 6 April 1943.....	<b>Oran, Algeria</b>		
6 April 1943- 8 April 1943.....	<b>En route</b>		
8 April 1943-13 Aug. 1943.....	<b>Ain M'lila, Algeria</b>	27 March 1943-11 Oct. 1943.....	<b>Sudbury, England</b>
13 Aug. 1943-19 Oct. 1943.....	<b>Bizerte, Tunisia</b>		
19 Oct. 1943-20 Oct. 1943.....	<b>En route</b>		
20 Oct. 1943-11 Nov. 1943.....	<b>Palermo, Sicily</b>		
11 Nov. 1943-27 Nov. 1943.....	<b>En route</b>		
27 Nov. 1943-19 Dec. 1943.....	<b>Lichfield, England</b>	11 Oct. 1943-22 Dec. 1943.....	<b>Shugborough Park, England</b>

19 Dec. 1943-20 June 1944.....	<b>Stourport, England</b>
20 June 1944-22 June 1944.....	<b>En route</b>
22 June 1944-24 June 1944.....	<b>St. Laurent, France</b>
24 June 1944-16 July 1944.....	<b>Cricqueville, France</b>
16 July 1944- 5 Aug. 1944.....	<b>Lison, France</b>
5 Aug. 1944-19 Aug. 1944.....	<b>Canisy, France</b>
19 Aug. 1944-26 Aug. 1944.....	<b>Lassay, France</b>
26 Aug. 1944- 2 Sept. 1944.....	<b>Senonches, France</b>
2 Sept. 1944- 5 Sept. 1944.....	<b>Voisins, France</b>
5 Sept. 1944-14 Sept. 1944.....	<b>La Capelle, France</b>
14 Sept. 1944-16 Sept. 1944.....	<b>Ouffet, Belgium</b>
16 Sept. 1944-28 Sept. 1944.....	<b>Herbesthal, Belgium</b>
28 Sept. 1944-26 Oct. 1944.....	<b>Baelen, Belgium</b>
26 Oct. 1944-18 Dec. 1944.....	<b>Spa, Belgium</b>
18 Dec. 1944-16 Jan. 1945.....	<b>Huy, Belgium</b>
17 Jan. 1945- 9 March 1945.....	<b>Spa, Belgium</b>
10 March 1945-25 March 1945.....	<b>Eschweiler, Germany</b>
26 March 1945- 6 April 1945.....	<b>Bad Godesberg, Germany</b>
7 April 1945-13 April 1945.....	<b>Marburg, Germany</b>
14 April 1945-22 April 1945.....	<b>Bad Wildungen, Germany</b>
23 April 1945-23 May 1945.....	<b>Weimar, Germany (Belvederer Allee)</b>
23 May 1945-23 June 1945.....	<b>Weimar, Germany (SS Barracks)</b>
23 June 1945-31 July 1945.....	<b>Giessen, Germany</b>



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# **FRONT LINE SURGEONS**





## Chapter I



# Fort Sam Houston, Here We Come!

The captain propped his feet on the desk and reached for the morning paper. He was bored. In the adjutant's office at Fitzsimons Hospital, nothing ever happened. A few clerks were talking about last night's basketball game. A mail orderly dawdled by the water cooler. Through a glass partition came the sounds of a typewriter, muffled and intermittent. Nobody was in a hurry. The captain began to read.

The news was all about the war. The Japs were pushing up the Burma Road. The British had just occupied Madagascar. A man called Eisenhower seemed to swing a lot of weight in Washington. But it all sounded so far away. By comparison Fitzsimons General Hospital was just drudgery. Nothing but reports, inspections, and more reports. Why couldn't the war be fought without three copies of every trivial transaction? The captain shifted his gaze to the window where the Rocky Mountains seemed to frame his thoughts. It would be nice to have a picnic tonight.

The telephone rang.

"This is Fitzsimons General Hospital."

"This is Fort Sam Houston. Just issued orders for the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group. We want the cadre here tomorrow."

Holy smokes. The Third Auxiliary Surgical Group? Why, that was *his* new outfit! And the cadre was supposed to be there tomorrow? No time to be lost now. Clear the

decks. Picnic go hang. Round up the men. Finish service records. Transfer company funds. Find out about trains. Get rolling. It was 5 May 1942.

A cadre is a small group of key personnel that is sent out to form the nucleus of a new unit. In this case it consisted of Captain Clifford L. Graves and six enlisted men: a first sergeant, a mess sergeant, a supply sergeant, a clerk, a cook, and a cook's helper. These men had been selected a few days earlier but they had no inkling that their departure would be so precipitous. Graves thought that he could smell a rat. He went to the executive officer.

"Say—what is this? Are we going on a wild goose chase or do they really want us that bad?"

"Don't kid yourself. You're the first outfit to be ordered out by phone. I bet you'll be on the boat in a week!"

Good heavens! This sounded like the real thing. Fort Sam Houston was a thousand miles away. Twenty-four hours by train. Suppose he missed that train? That would mean dereliction, court-martial, disgrace. He dared not think further. The train was too slow. He would fly. This assignment meant everything.

Eight hours and three traffic tickets later, Graves jumped out of a cab, grabbed his suitcase, and dashed for the waiting plane. Hurrah! He had made it. Now the war could start.



Fort Sam Houston in May 1942. The 2nd Division lines up for review.

Fort Sam Houston the next day did not look at all like the place to give birth to such a whirlwind organization as the Third Aux. In the hot afternoon sun the enormous drill-field was a vast empty space. Soldiers moved with a matter-of-factness that was strangely inconsistent with the occasion. "Must be to deceive the enemy," was Graves' reaction and without further speculation he ordered his cab to take him to the hospital. He closed his eyes and rehearsed what he was going to say: "Captain Graves reporting for duty with the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group." Then the adjutant would jump up and say: "Yes, Captain. We have been expecting you. Here are your orders. You sail next Monday." How exciting!

The cab drew up at the hospital and Graves bounced out. A sergeant was on duty

at the information desk:

"Third Auxiliary Surgical Group? Never heard of it, Captain. Maybe the O.D. knows."

The O.D. consulted his file.

"I don't see it on my record, Captain. Try the Adjutant."

The Hospital Adjutant scratched his head.

"Sorry, Captain. The Post Adjutant may be able to help you."

The Post Adjutant was emphatic.

"Now wait a minute, Captain. I have been in this man's Army a long time and I never even heard of an auxiliary surgical group."

Third Army Headquarters was next.

"Third Auxill—Third Auxilla—. Well, anyway, we don't have it here."

## FORT SAM HOUSTON, HERE WE COME!

That left only one place, Corps Area Service Command. Wearily, Graves pursued this last remaining clue. He drew a blank. The Third Aux was a phantom, a mirage, a figment in the minds of the men at the Pentagon.

Actually, there *was* someone at Fort Sam Houston who knew all about the Third Aux and a very important person he was: none other than Lieutenant Colonel J. Fred Blatt, commanding officer of the organization. An eminently practical man, he knew that in the Army it does not always pay to be inquisitive. While Captain Graves scoured the Post for a scent, Blatt was relaxing at the Officers Club. It was not until the next day that the two men met, quite by accident.

The same thing that happened to Captain Graves on his first day at Fort Sam Houston happened to a hundred other Third Auxers during the next six months. Always the

same urgency about the orders. Always the same headlong rush. Always the same sobering reception. The only difference in the welcoming routine was that the sergeant at the information desk would no longer just raise his eyebrows. Instead, he would say with an air of authority: "The Third Aux? Oh yes. That's that crazy outfit over by the water tower." Deflated, the new recruits would find a nondescript organization with an obscure past, a nebulous present, and an uncertain future. The Third Aux had a long way to go.

Be that as it may, on 7 May 1942 the Third Aux was nothing but a bedraggled, homeless, ridiculously inconspicuous little cluster of two officers and six enlisted men and it was destined to remain that way for many weeks. If the War Department had been in a great hurry with the activation, it was in just as much hurry to forget all about the "crazy outfit." What was an auxiliary surgical group anyway? No one knew because such a group had never been in existence before. The Medico-Military Manual, otherwise a bible of information, dismissed the subject with two short paragraphs. It spoke vaguely about the First World War, mentioned a table of organization dating back to 1926, and theorized about the use of surgical teams in the zone of communications. About all that could be determined was that the Third Aux would operate under Table of Organization 8/512. This table called for 58 surgical teams and a headquarters section. Each team was to have three medical officers, a nurse, and two enlisted men. The teams were as follows:

- 24 general surgical teams
- 6 splint teams
- 6 shock teams
- 6 gas teams
- 4 maxillofacial teams
- 4 neurosurgical teams
- 4 thoracic surgical teams
- 4 miscellaneous teams



Colonel Blatt, Picture taken at Shugborough Park, England in November 1943.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

A slight modification after the Group was overseas (T/O 8/571) added three dental teams and fixed the number of officers at 132, nurses at 70, and enlisted men at 176.

But how was this Group to operate? Would the teams go to the front or stay at the base? Would they be independent units or helpless appendages? Would they do important work or would they be merely tolerated? These were the questions that assailed Colonel Blatt and Captain Graves and there was no answer.

In the absence of any palpable leads, the little group tackled the job of housekeeping. There had to be an office, there had to be a mess, there had to be transportation, and there had to be billets. The billeting officer put the Third Aux where he thought it belonged: in a barracks housing the riot squad!



This is where the Third Aux set up shop with two officers and six enlisted men.

Here, Colonel Blatt and Captain Graves took the first steps towards shaping the Third Aux, steps that were all but ground out by the noise of trains outside and GI profanity inside. It was too much. After two days, Colonel Blatt importuned the Post Adjutant to give up an unused mess hall in the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. On 9 May the Third Aux proudly took possession of its new home. And, except for the steaming atmosphere and the extraordinary number of flies, it was a reasonably happy home.

The first official act was to appoint Captain Graves executive officer, adjutant, personnel officer, plans and training officer, supply officer, agent finance officer, summary court officer, transportation officer, detachment commander, and fund custodian. At that, his duties consisted of little more than to scan the mail, sign the roster, shoot the bull, pass the buck, write through channels, and keep a copy.

The second official act was to attach the enlisted men for quarters and rations to an organization that was already a going concern: the 56th Evacuation Hospital.

The third official act was to write a letter to the War Department and ask what it was all about. The answer was somewhat disappointing. For instance, Colonel Blatt wanted to know about organizational equipment. An evacuation hospital with less personnel than an auxiliary surgical group draws enough stuff to fill fifty trucks. The Third Aux drew not even a table of allowances. Apparently, the powers considered this a matter that could be adjusted later. It never was. Until the very end, Third Auxers lived in borrowed tents, rode in borrowed trucks, and cooked on borrowed stoves.

The Fort Sam Quartermaster came to the rescue. Somewhere in fine print it said that an auxiliary surgical group could have three cars and three trucks. Colonel Blatt relaxed. Never again did the Third Aux have so much transportation for so few people.

Those first six weeks were discouraging indeed. There was a first sergeant but there were no men to drill. There was a supply sergeant but there were no supplies to store. There was a mess sergeant but there was no mess to run. There was a cook but there was no food to cook. There was a cook's helper but there was no cook to help. So everybody helped everybody else do nothing. Third Auxers lived in a vacuum and it was hard to take at a time when the Japs had

## FORT SAM HOUSTON, HERE WE COME!

overrun the Philippines, when the Germans were threatening Cairo, and when the Russians were hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

And then, on one particularly hot and idle afternoon towards the end of June, Colonel Blatt picked up the mail and jumped. "Hooray," he said, "we're off." The reason for this unusual outburst was that a new officer had been assigned to the Group. He was Captain Kenneth Smith who made his appearance on 25 June. Barely had he settled down when six more officers followed him in rapid succession. They were Major Watkins A. Broyles, Major W. A. Millington, Captain C. Harold Avent (now deceased), Lieutenant Oscar B. Snider, Lieutenant Benjamin G. Bauerle, and Major Clarence E. Snow. Captain Smith became an understudy for Captain Graves. The others went on detached service at the Station Hospital. Later, when the Group was being groomed for overseas duty, these men came back to Headquarters to help with the readying process.

On 1 July another big event occurred: the first shipment of enlisted men arrived. There were twenty-one of them and they looked mighty good to the critical eyes of Colonel Blatt and Captain Graves. In no time at all they had been processed, tested, classified, and billeted. Some went to the school for medical technicians, some to the school for cooks and bakers, and the rest were quickly transformed into drivers, mechanics, clerks, and orderlies. Now for the first time it was possible to make up schedules and start training. Slowly the Third Aux was taking shape.

One of the great problems at that time and for the next two years was how to train technicians without equipment. These men who came from the farms, the shops, and the high schools of America were going to work in an operating room some day. How to get them ready? The school for tech-

nicians at Fort Sam Houston did a creditable job but it suffered from lack of teaching material. It was all very well for a man to listen to a lecture on anatomy or malaria control but that did not teach him how to set up a sterile table. Therefore, as soon as the Chief Nurse, Lieutenant Anna Moline, reported for duty she was asked to organize a practical course. By dividing the students into small groups, she was able to rotate them through the utility rooms, the operating rooms, the sterilizing rooms, the surgical wards, and all the other departments of a hospital. The graduates of this course became valuable instructors when the Group was on its own overseas.

During those long, hot summer months in the arid country of southern Texas, life for Third Auxers alternated between great excitement and utter boredom. It was a time when everybody was completely in the dark and when every opinion, no matter how wild or unreasonable, became a subject for heated argument. There were the serious ones and the lighthearted ones, the worriers and the jokers, the introverts and the extroverts. At the mess, the conversation would run about like this:

"Say, fellow, did you hear the latest? We're sailing next week and they are going to give us those damned life-preservers that make you turn upside down in the water so you drown like a rat. I heard about them from my brother."

"Holy mackerel! You don't mean it, do you? Why, that's plain murder! But we won't *all* have to sail, will we? I heard that men over thirty-seven can stay home."

"Hell no! The old guys will be sacrificed first. The War Department figures that the young people are more valuable. But you might get to fly."

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"Well, I don't know if that's much better. I think I'll turn in at the hospital. I had asthma once."

"No use, fellow. They've got your number. At the Pentagon they already call us the suicide squad."

At other times there was real reason for consternation. The telephone call that came in one Saturday afternoon when everybody had gone for the weekend was enough to give any commanding officer the jitters. The call came from the Quartermaster at Fort Sam Houston.

"Hello, is this the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group?"

"Roger."

"I've got orders here to equip you for immediate shipment overseas. You've got A-1 priority."

"????????"

"That's what it says here. You are to get full field equipment plus an extra issue of dust respirators, sun goggles, tropical helmets, mosquito bars, and quinine."

"But we haven't got anybody here to equip. We have exactly ten officers and forty men. You don't mean that they are going to send us at ten per cent strength, do you?"

"Well, that's what it says here. Better send your trucks over right away."

What had happened? It was all a little matter of confusing the Third Aux with the Second Aux. The War Department at this time was making preparations for the invasion of North Africa and the plans called for several surgical teams. The Second Aux, which had been activated at Lawson General Hospital a few weeks before the Third Aux, was selected to supply these teams. Somebody in Washington had switched the numbers and sent the orders to the wrong address! It was as simple as that but before the error was discovered, there were a lot of people at Fort Sam who tore their hair and gnashed their teeth. The



General Fred Rankin, Chief of Professional Services.

Second Aux teams left the country in September and landed in North Africa on 11 November.

The Third Aux had hardly subsided into its now natural somnolence when there came a real dust-raiser: a telegram from the War Department instructing Colonel Blatt to report to the Chief of Professional Services in Washington for the selection of officer personnel. This was on 3 September.

The country had now been at war almost nine months. Thousands of medical officers had been called into service. Each officer had filled out a questionnaire. The evaluation of these questionnaires took much time, and while this was going on, the officers were put in cold storage in medical pools all over the country. When Colonel Blatt arrived in Washington, he found some 30,000 questionnaires already on file.

The Third Aux needed 48 completely trained, vigorous, young surgeons, 48 assistants to these surgeons, and 48 expert anesthetists. To select these, Colonel Blatt had many conferences with General Rankin who was then Chief of Professional Services. It was a big job, a job that could make or break the Third Aux. Time proved that Colonel Blatt used good judgment. When he

## FORT SAM HOUSTON, HERE WE COME!

returned to Fort Sam Houston he had with him a tentative roster of men who became the backbone of the organization, men who carried on from the very beginning till the very end, men who went through three invasions and seven campaigns, men who combined professional maturity with youthful enthusiasm. In age, they ranged between thirty and forty-five and in experience they represented the best that America had to offer. These were the front-line surgeons of the Second World War.

The pool system was undoubtedly the best way of fitting every man into his niche, but it did have its vagaries. Men from the eastern part of the country would be sent to pools in California, from there to the Third Aux in Texas, and then back to New York for embarkation. Typical of these was Lieutenant Friedman. Snatched from his home on Riverside Drive in New York City on 15 November, he was dispatched to the pool at Santa Barbara, California. He had barely arrived when he was transferred to the Third Aux in San Antonio. At Fort Sam he was just in time to get on the train for Camp Kilmer and on 1 December he found himself back in New York. When the Queen Mary cast loose, Friedman had traveled 8,000 miles to get from 116th Street to 59th Street, a distance of about three miles.

On 27 September, the Third Aux had 11 officers. On 27 November when it left for Camp Kilmer it had 119. At Camp Kilmer 10 more officers joined to bring the total to 129. These 129 officers came from every State in the Union. They brought with them fresh ideas and they exchanged information at every opportunity. These men learned from each other and the experience was tremendously stimulating. The Third Aux was a great melting pot.

Keeping pace was a rapid build-up in enlisted men. The first contingent arrived on 1 July and came from Camp Barkley. Between 1 July and 26 November, a half

dozen packets joined. They came from Camp Barkley, Camp Robinson, Camp Pickett, the Beaumont General Hospital, and the 56th Evacuation Hospital. Altogether, the enlisted strength on the day the Group left Fort Sam was 176. Six men had to be dropped at the staging area so that the final strength on sailing was 170.

As more and more men joined the organization, Major Graves gradually gave up his multitudinous assignments and concentrated on Plans and Training. First, Captain Smith became Adjutant. This lasted only until he was sent to Edgewood Arsenal for a course in gas warfare. Then Major Harry P. Harper, who later was to become Executive Officer, took over as Adjutant. The other assignments were as follows:

Mess Officer: Captain Clarence J. Hudson.

Supply Officer: Lieutenant Rocco A. Tella.

Finance Officer: Captain William S. Maley.

Detachment Commander: Major Watkins A. Broyles.

Transportation Officer: Lieutenant Oscar B. Snider.

Intelligence Officer: Lieutenant Benjamin A. Bauerle.

Plans and Training Officer: Major Clifford L. Graves.

By 12 October, the officer strength was 36. This was considered enough to start a training program. Major Graves evolved a course of great practical interest. Rather than adhere rigidly to prescribed subjects, he decided to include any material that might be useful to men at the front. The course lasted six weeks during which Third Auxers saw the Army "as she is."

The introduction was a talk on the fundamental fighting unit, namely the infantry division. Officers from each representative unit within the division then illustrated how they accomplished their mission. An infantry captain showed the weapons of the foot soldier, first in the classroom and then in the

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field. After this, Third Auxers attended an exciting demonstration on the range where an entire infantry company fired all its weapons, first singly and then in unison. The 300 rifles going off at once, the ricochet of tracer bullets, the sharp snap of mortar shells, the lightning-quick motions of the crews, the flaming targets, these gave Third Auxers a healthy respect for what an infantry company can do.

The same sort of teaching was used for Division Artillery. A medium howitzer battalion was chosen as an example. After listening to a preliminary talk, Third Auxers went to Camp Bullis and deployed themselves at the firing position. It was a dreary afternoon but as soon as the four trucks, each with an 18,000 pound field-piece in tow, appeared on the scene, the spectators forgot all about the threatening rain. Within a few minutes of their arrival, the gunners were in position. Third Auxers were amazed that they could actually see the shells sailing through the air. They went to the forward observation post. By this time a drizzle had started, but not a single man elected to stay in the truck when the voice came over the telephone: "On the way!" Seconds later the shells appeared overhead and burst into flame on the target. Later on, the sound of these same howitzers became only too familiar to Third Auxers because in the combat zone, field hospitals are in front of the guns. To know that each shell is always carefully tagged is a source of satisfaction or anguish, depending on where a man is.

There were no tanks at Fort Sam Houston but the San Antonio Arsenal had plenty of them. Every Third Auxer got inside the turret and rode around the testing ground, an experience that made him fully cognizant of what a tank driver goes through. When these same tank drivers were brought to the field hospitals in Europe, Third Auxers understood why the wounds were of the most devastating kind.

When it came to medical service in the field, the Third Aux instructors had very little to go by. Nobody yet knew where the teams would work. Existing manuals were little help. The only guide was the interesting book "Field Surgery in Total War" by Major Jolly, a New Zealander who had gained his experience in the Spanish Civil War. In this book Major Jolly explained the three-point-forward system which was eventually copied by the Americans. The words three-point-forward refer to the three kinds of hospitals that are needed in the line of evacuation, namely a small forward hospital for severely wounded, a larger intermediate hospital for all other wounded, and a still larger base hospital for definitive care. Third Auxers discussed this book from every angle.

To give the men an idea of medical installations in the field Major Graves asked the 2nd Division to put on demonstrations. Third Auxers saw battalion aid stations, collecting stations, and clearing stations and they learned about the problems of evacuation in the combat zone. It was their introduction to a subject that was to occupy all their energies.

At this time the 2nd Division went through airborne maneuvers. Third Auxers participated. These maneuvers made such a profound impression on the men that when the airborne divisions sent out a call for volunteer surgical teams shortly before the Normandy invasion Third Auxers rose magnificently to the occasion. Their experiences form one of the most exciting chapters in the history of the Group.

Army training programs lay great stress on physical hardening and road marches, two features that are not exactly popular with medical men. However, here too Major Graves had a solution. He substituted horseback rides for the weekly road marches! Every Wednesday morning the Third Aux would go for a canter. The rides continued

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The Third Aux goes on a canter.

until one fine morning when Major Haynes drew an exceptionally frisky mare and was thrown from his galloping mount in front of the house of the Commanding General. Haynes suffered a minor concussion and the General sent word that the Third Aux was a surgical group, not a cavalry group. From then on, Third Auxers marched.

It can be seen that the program was not only highly practical but also had its lighter moments. When one of the officers remarked that the course had been complete except for the parachute jump, a note appeared on the bulletin board with the following announcement:

### ATTENTION BLATT COMMANDOS

Because of our peculiar mission as itinerant surgeons, we may be called upon at any time to travel by plane over unknown territory. Emergency landings should be anticipated. To teach every man of this organization how to orient himself on the surface of the globe by celestial observation, an instructor from the Hondo School for Aerial Navigation will hold a special class next Tuesday. His words may save our lives some day.

The class was held as scheduled but the notice had some unexpected by-products. Intended mainly to stimulate interest, it created trepidation in not a few and even led one man to seek admission to the hospital. Others reacted exactly the opposite and sent copies home to prove that they belonged to a blood-and-thunder outfit. The only Third Auxer actually to profit from the class was Captain Serbst. In the spring of 1945 Serbst escaped from the prison camp at Hammelburg and found his way to the American lines "by the stars."

As the Group grew in size, Colonel Blatt had to cast about for larger quarters. At first, the officers could easily be accommodated in the BOQ but towards the end of September the 2nd Division returned from maneuvers and its numerous company-grade officers quickly overflowed the buildings. Fort Sam had been built on the orthodox premise that the Army has about one officer to ten enlisted men. The Third Aux fell completely out of line. It actually had more officers than men! Nothing like it had ever

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Dodd Field, a dreary tent camp of World War I vintage.

been seen before. The billeting officer threw up his hands. There just wasn't *lebensraum* for the Third Aux.

The only solution was to repair to Dodd Field, a dreary tent-camp of World War I vintage. Third Auxers had eyed it with suspicion from the beginning because they all realized that eventually those drafty tents and dusty streets would become home to them. The move took place in September for the enlisted men and somewhat later for the officers. Not all of them embraced the rugged hospitality with patriotic enthusiasm. San Antonio had a fine hotel, the St. Anthony. For a long time after the Group was overseas, Third Auxers took a vicarious pleasure in recounting its air-conditioned luxuries.

There was another reason why Dodd Field quickly became a source of irritation: it was more than two miles from the main Post. To get from Headquarters to Dodd Field a man had to tramp for forty minutes over a rough, graveled road that exacted its toll in

sprained ankles and ruined shoes. The only man to cope successfully with this obstacle was Major Graves who bumped along on his bicycle at all hours of the day.

Towards the middle of November the bomb burst. The Third Aux was alerted. Headquarters became a beehive. Officers were arriving in droves. An assembly line was organized. The newcomers were interviewed by Colonel Blatt, welcomed by Major Graves, processed by their fellows, fingerprinted, radiated, ultravioletized, drawn, and quartered. Nothing was left to the imagination. Captain Avent took care of the immunization records, the dog tags, the eye glasses, the blood-type cards, and the identification cards. Sergeant Brattesani had the allotment forms and the insurance blanks. Captain Serbst handled the classification cards. Major Haynes was in charge of the emergency addressee cards, the safe-arrival cards, and the locator cards. Major Snow took care of the baggage stencils. Lieutenant Tella busied himself with supplies and equipment. Captain Maley had the pay vouchers,

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the pay-data cards, the travel-and-uniform allowances, the last-will-and testament, and the power-of-attorney blanks. Everything but the last rites.

But this was not all. Soon the Third Aux would be roughing it. Everyone knew it and everyone wanted to be prepared. The Quartermaster supplied the basic items such as the pup tent, the mosquito bar, the bedding roll, the suspender belt, the meat pan, the mess kit, the canteen, and the first-aid pouch. But these were only bare necessities. A man had to have a sleeping bag, an air mattress, a valpak. Each time someone showed up at Headquarters with one of these articles, there would be a run on the Post Exchange by a hundred others. The next day it might be a canvas water dipper, a bowie knife, a money belt, a compass, an identification bracelet, a Zippo lighter, or a Burberry coat. Again there would be a Px invasion. The line of reasoning ran from the sublime

to the ridiculous. Captain Stoller stuck his Harvard Reader next to his gas mask and Captain Sutton inquired solemnly: "I wonder if I should take a pillow?" Some men laid in a three months' supply of soap, others a six months' supply of candy, and still others a year's supply of tobacco. Hour-long discussions arose on what was useful and what was useless, until the standard greeting became not "How are you?" but "What did you buy today?"

Of course, all this equipment had to be packed. The only container large enough was the bedding roll which also provided room for GI underwear, heavy overalls, high-top shoes, woolen blankets, a pup tent, a mosquito bar, a mattress cover, and odds and ends. Just to roll the giant sausage took three men: one to pound, one to pull, and one to roll. Carrying it was completely out of the question. A few Third Auxers eventually learned to subdue the monster, but

San Antonio hotels.



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for the majority it always remained a source of despair. Ruth Maher put it this way:

### THE BEDDING ROLL

Ye mighty piece of canvas  
You've intrigued my every art  
And taxed my ingenuity  
Even though you play a part.

I've packed your pockets full of soap  
And food and other stuff.  
Then, when I think the job's complete  
I find it's not enough.

I've juggled shoes and hats and shirts  
And HBT's to wear  
Then find that I've forgotten  
That GI underwear.

I've pulled and pushed and struggled  
With GI straps galore  
And when I think it's good and tight  
There's something on the floor.

A GI shoe that's fallen out  
And so again I start  
Apushing and apulling  
Till I'm master of the art.

And so I strive to do the job  
But the question that I place:  
"Will I be line-of-duty yes  
If I fall dead upon my face?"

If Third Auxers thought that their bedding roll was a headache, Colonel Blatt had an even bigger headache with the organizational equipment. The Third Aux had no table of allowances. Officially it was a pauper. Could this extraordinary organization go overseas empty-handed? Colonel Blatt thought no. He went into a huddle with the Quartermaster. Scanning the tables of equipment for more conventional units,

these men estimated how much of each item would probably be required by an auxiliary surgical group. The result was imposing, if extravagant. When everything had been packed and stacked, there were no less than sixty crates with everything from detectors, vesicant, liquid, to curtains, proof, gas. Lieutenant Tella was overwhelmed. His job was to safeguard all this property. It was love's labor lost. Of the sixty boxes, less than twenty arrived overseas. The other forty now rest on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Lieutenant Tella's tenure as supply officer was punctuated by another fiasco. At Fort Sam he drew some two hundred chairs for use in the class room. In the normal course of events, these chairs would have been returned to the warehouse when the Third Aux left, but in the general hurly-burly of the last few days, there was no time. Certainly, there were more important things to worry about than two hundred chairs that were no good to anybody in the footloose Third Aux. On the day of departure Tella simply signed a memorandum receipt and promptly forgot all about the chairs.

But not the Quartermaster. When he came to balance his books at the end of the year, the memorandum receipt was missing. Slowly the wheels began to turn. A letter was dispatched. It went to England. It went to North Africa. It went to Sicily. And it was delivered to Lieutenant Tella in the first mail to reach the front. While his teammates enthusiastically discussed the latest news from home, Tella was treated to the information that his chairs were lost in action and that he would be held accountable to the tune of \$1400. He immediately penned an endorsement which stated in dignified language that his main concern at that moment was to dodge shells and not to retrieve chairs! This stopped the Fort Sam sleuths dead in their tracks. Nothing was ever heard from them again.

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The Group was now rapidly nearing the end of its stay at Fort Sam. On 15 November the Third Aux was alerted. The date of departure was set for early in December. Wiseacres said: "Don't get excited. It will be months before we get going. Why, I know a unit that didn't leave for six months after it was alerted!" A few days later the alert was indeed cancelled and the same men said: "You see! I told you so!" They wired wives to come down. They rented houses and apartments for the season. They hung onto cars that had already been promised to would-be buyers. Everybody settled down for a winter in Texas.

Then came the devastating news: You move on 27 November! That gave just two days to get ready. To understand what it meant, one must realize that at this stage the Group was still only partly organized. Enlisted strength was less than half of what it should be. New officers were arriving every hour. Many of those already assigned were away on detached service. Third Auxers were scattered between San Antonio and Boston. How to get all these people back in time?

Wires buzzed. Telephones jangled. Teletype messages flew back and forth. Police in a dozen States were put on the lookout for Third Auxers. Lieutenant Spritzer was one of those who made it. He was in St. Louis, taking a course in chest surgery. When the alert sounded, he had just left on a hurried trip to his home in New Jersey. In Columbus, Ohio he suddenly decided that it might be a good idea to call home. The news hit him like a ton of bricks. He turned his car around, gave her the gun, and raced non-stop to San Antonio.

Captain Smith was one of those who did not make it. He was at Edgewood Arsenal, studying chemical warfare. Edgewood Arsenal is near Philadelphia. A hard-boiled adjutant refused to honor Smith's telegraphed orders. Precious hours were lost in verifica-

tion. Finally Smith got on a train that arrived in San Antonio six hours after the Third Aux had left. He barely had time to say good-by to his family, draw his field equipment, and sell his car. Then he was off again for a place that was about forty miles from where he started!

And then there were the men who had just installed their families in San Antonio. And the men who found themselves with cars that they could not get rid of. And the wives who were left stranded with cars they could not drive. And the wife who arrived in San Antonio from California two hours before train time and kept right on till she got to New York. And the officer who was transferred on the day of departure but misinterpreted his orders in the confusion. He became a technical AWOL. It was an endless string of conflicts, misunderstandings, dilemmas, and cross-ups.

But these entanglements were picayune compared with the difficulties that confronted Headquarters. Communications were painfully slow. Trucks and cars had been turned in. Telephones worked only spasmodically. A shipment of one hundred enlisted men arrived at midnight on 26 November and had to be processed on the spot. There were bedding rolls to be stenciled, bills to be settled, belongings to be disposed of, funds to be converted, inventories to be made, quarters to be vacated, and rosters to be completed. It was a Thanksgiving Day no Third Auxer will ever forget.

Train time was set for two o'clock. As the time drew nearer, the pressure increased. The same office that had lain dormant all summer now became a scene of feverish activity. Clerks worked frantically over rosters. The new adjutant, Lieutenant Penterman, fussed and fumed about missing service records. Captain Hudson called all over town to find a butcher with half a ton of meat for sale. Colonel Blatt argued with two

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**At noon the officers began to gather at the railroad siding. Captain and Mrs. Hoffman, Major Church, Lieutenant Privitera, Captain and Mrs. Soderstrom, Captain Maloney.**

excited officials from the Transportation Corps. A work party dismantled the office piece by piece. Filing cabinets, stacks of paper, folding chairs, field desks, strong boxes, everything that was not actually nailed down was carted out with screens slamming, floors creaking, and men groaning. And over it all hung Sergeant Johnson's motto: "The difficult we do right away; the impossible takes a little longer."

At noon the officers began to gather at the railroad siding, accompanied by wives, relatives, friends, and well-wishers. Some were cheerful, many were tearful. After all, this farewell might be the last one. Next, Lieutenant Moline appeared on the scene.

She was accompanied by two newly assigned nurses: Merle L. Harper and Edythe E. MacDonald. At one o'clock the detachment marched up, smartly led by Major Broyles. Well might he be proud of his men. With full field pack, steel helmet, gas mask, and entrenching tool, they looked like fighting soldiers. This was the day when every man felt that he was coming to the aid of his country.

At a quarter to two, a mud-caked sedan drove up. Out stepped Lieutenant Osteen. Osteen was not due until the next day but, being an eager beaver, he had decided to report "a little early." His diligence was richly rewarded. When he drove into Fort

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Sam and asked where the Third Aux was, he was told: "At the railroad siding. If you hurry you can just catch them." Osteen repacked his baggage, signed the necessary papers, kissed his wife good-by, and got on the train, all in ten minutes. Never was a transformation accomplished more expeditiously.

Meanwhile Colonel Blatt was biting his lips. The roll call showed two of his best officers missing. He argued with himself and with the dispatcher. Could the Third Aux afford to wait? The train schedule had been worked out to the last minute. At the other end of the line the Queen Mary was waiting. Delay might wreck the whole itinerary. No, there was not a moment to be lost. The conductor lifted his arm. The engineer blew his whistle. Slowly the twelve-car train began to move.

But wait, who was this, running down the road as fast as his spindly legs would carry him? Would he make it? For a moment the issue was in doubt. Then the train slowed down a little and under tremendous cheers Major Hatt swung aboard. His was the all-time record. At ten o'clock he had asked for overseas duty; at two he was on the way.

Then a most extraordinary thing happened. The train was going through a grade crossing at which a jeep had pulled up. In the jeep was a brand-new Third Auxer, Captain Whitsitt. He had arrived that same morning and had reported to Colonel Blatt when the confusion was at its height. Be-deviled with a dozen tasks, Colonel Blatt had sent Whitsitt to get clearance for the Group. At a post as large as Fort Sam, this was a big job. It meant going to all the places where Third Auxers might have outstanding debts. Whitsitt started out with the enthusiasm of a man who is on his first important military mission.

Whitsitt was afoot. As long as he was on the main campus he did well enough but

when it came to the outlying offices he began to lose out. Several times he had to retrace his steps. From the Officers' Club to the laundry. From the laundry to the Post Exchange. From the Post Exchange to the Hospital library. From the Hospital library to the Post library. From the Post library to the filling station. From the filling station to the commissary. From the commissary to the Quartermaster. And that was as far as he got. Try as he might, he could not remember where to go next. He hailed a jeep.

"Corporal, take me to the Third Aux."

"Third Aux? Where's that, Captain?"

"Over there," said Whitsitt, motioning vaguely.

The jeep started up. Whitsitt looked at his watch. Ten minutes after two! He'd better hurry back. "Step on it, corporal." The jeep gathered speed, only to be forced



First Sergeant Robert T. Nelson.

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to a halt at a grade crossing. A train was coming around the bend. Annoyed, Whitsitt settled back. No use getting run over. He lighted a cigarette and checked his list for the umteenth time.

The locomotive rumbled past. Whitsitt glanced up. "Wish that engineer would hurry up," he said to himself, putting his papers in his pocket. Then he looked more closely. Weren't those the same faces he had seen that morning? Suddenly he recognized Colonel Blatt. Ye Gods—this was the Third Aux train! "Stop!" he yelled at the top of his voice, jumping out of the jeep and

clutching his musette bag which was his only possession at the moment. But the engineer paid him no heed. He probably never even saw Whitsitt. One by one, the cars rolled by. It was a moment of agonizing suspense.

Then Whitsitt took matters in his own hands. He threw his musette bag to the ground, pushed a protesting brakeman aside, grabbed the railing of the last car, and shinned himself aboard with an agility that would have done credit to Errol Flynn.

The Third Aux was off with a Hollywood finish.



## Chapter II



### The North Atlantic

Troop movements in wartime are secret but it was no secret to Third Auxers that their next stop was Camp Kilmer, staging area for the Port of New York. From San Antonio to New York is approximately two thousand miles, ordinarily a thirty-eight hour trip. The Third Aux Special took twice that. It meandered first north to Fort Worth, then east to Atlanta, and finally north again to Camp Kilmer. It was a journey that started with exuberant patriotism and ended in dreary tedium.

While most Third Auxers breathed a sigh of relief once the train was under way, Headquarters went to work as if nothing had happened. A vast amount of administrative detail had to be attended to. Colonel Blatt surveyed the six Pullman cars, the six coaches, and the two freight cars. Then he allocated the space. The cooks took over the freight cars and started forthwith on the job of feeding three hundred people. The supply sergeant established himself in one of the coaches and issued clothing to the newly joined men. The train surgeon arranged for a dispensary and carried on with the innumerable immunizations. The clerks moved their typewriters to the club car and hammered out service records. A board of senior officers began interviewing and classifying the professional personnel. Even the intelligence officer had his moment of triumph when he nabbed a man who tried to get a letter mailed in Shreveport. Such was

the tension that the culprit was considered little better than a traitor and his trial was carried out in great secrecy. But New York taxi drivers knew all about the Queen Mary. When Mrs. Soderstrom and Mrs. Maloney got off the train at Grand Central station a few days later, their cab driver wagged: "Well, ladies, I see that you are here to see your men folk off on the Queen Mary. She'll be shoving off in a couple of days."

During the first half of the train ride Third Auxers amused themselves with card games, song fests, small talk, and short snorts. Gradually the landscape changed from the sunny South to the snowy East. A chill settled, literally and figuratively. The song birds got hoarse, the card sharks lost interest, and the short snorters ran out of dollar bills. Washington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia were just so many dank and dreary railroad stations. Impatiently the men looked out for a sign of Camp Kilmer. Nothing even remotely resembling a camp showed up and when the train finally coasted to a stop the only human habitation within sight was a freight house. Third Auxers stretched their aching limbs, adjusted their packs, and stepped down into the melting snow. It was eleven o'clock on the morning of 30 November.

When Third Auxers talk about their three years in the Army they always mention Camp Kilmer as the place they would least like to revisit. Located in a desolate section

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of New Jersey, Kilmer offered absolutely nothing to make life bearable. Long rows of barracks stretched dismally along unpaved streets that were either frozen solid or churned into mud. The camouflage was depressing. The Group was scattered over remote parts of the camp. The weather was abominable. Field shoes still needed breaking in. Flannel underwear was either too warm or too cold. The chow was of the worst. The daily routine was exasperating.

The day started at seven o'clock with roll call. Blue with cold or wet with rain, Third Auxers would line up in the company street to get instructions. They might hear that typhoid inoculations would get under way or that every man would draw a packet of sulfa pills or that the barracks were to be policed better or that there was no news but to stand by for news. Everybody went around in circles. To make matters worse, Third Auxers became acquainted with a group of brother medics who were in even greater distress. The Northwestern University unit had been poised at Kilmer for weeks

with numerous false starts and no progress. Weeks of this? God forbid.

The only cheering event was the assignment of the nurses. There were sixty-seven of them, mostly from Michigan. They had missed the boat when the University of Michigan unit sailed a month earlier. Again, a processing line was set up but this time it operated in a dingy barracks room where a feeble light vainly tried to dispel the darkness. These women were introduced to the Third Aux in an atmosphere of uncertainty, discomfort, and frustration. If they were discouraged, they never showed it.

On 3 December an advance detail left Kilmer to prepare the ground for the embarkation on the Queen. On 7 December the news broke: We sail tonight! The Third Aux sprang into action. Hoarders made their last dash for the Post Exchange. Bedding rolls were tuned up for the last time. Letter writers wrote their last farewells. Drinking partners had their last toast. And at five o'clock the entire organization lined up. The officers wore their regulation overcoats. The



Captain Horace Williams gets the business.

## THE NORTH ATLANTIC

nurses wore their service blues. The enlisted men wore full field uniform. In the rapidly gathering dusk, the assembly stretched as far as the eye could see. Company . . . . attention! Was this the same outfit that had started in a cubbyhole at Fort Sam only seven months before? Forward . . . . march! The front line surgeons of World War II were marching off to battle. Column left . . . . march! Hitler, here we come.

A light snow began to fall. Each man was engrossed in his thoughts. Every step was a step away from home, family, and friends. HUT, two, three, four. . . . Mentally, the ocean had been crossed not once but a dozen times. HUT, two, three four. All right . . . If this is war, let's get it over with.

Out of the darkness loomed the waiting train, the windows blacked out, the steps marked by flickering lanterns. Silently, Third Auxers lined up. They had only one wish: to get on that train as quickly as possible and leave Camp Kilmer far behind. Then, at this unlikely moment, a band struck up. Out of the half-frozen trumpets and clarinets came the strains of "From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli." Third Auxers felt a wave of patriotism. Did this big, impersonal camp really take an interest in them? Was there somebody to witness their great sacrifice? For a moment they stood transfixed. But this was no time for reflection. Urged on by the icy wind and the deepening snow, everybody sought the steps that led inside the warm train. Kilmer was a memory.

Without further waiting, the train started on its run to Weehawken. Lights were low and conversations muffled. It was impossible to shake off the sinister implications of the moment. To relieve the tension, some of the men began telling funny stories. But it was a studied kind of light-heartedness. This was the time when a man reviewed his life and wrote *finis* to a chapter. What would the next one bring?

At ten o'clock the train pulled into the station. The ferry was in her slip. Everybody out! It was easier said than done. Now for the first time, every officer had to carry that valpak and the weight was enough to crush him. Handles snapped. Canvas ripped. Helmets dropped. Gas masks, musette bags, dispatch cases, canteens, garrison caps, everything dangled in a state of utter disarray. One fellow snorted: "Would anybody mind carrying my false teeth?" Another blurted: "I couldn't possibly want all those articles *that* bad."

The troops swarmed across the station platform and on to the ferry. Most of the men huddled inside to seek protection from the bitter cold. A few braved the icy blasts that blew across the harbor. They looked across the mouth of the Hudson to the southern tip of Manhattan. But it was not the Manhattan of yore. Gone were the myriads of lights, the flickering neon signs, the fantastic silhouette. Gone too were the brightly illuminated ferries that used to cast their glow over the water. The ferries were still there but they moved in silent, darkened motion. This was New York in the brown-out.

A whistle blew. A gate swung shut. The ferry throbbed and inched its way out into the river. Before it had gone a hundred yards it was challenged by a foghorn in the distance. The ferry answered with its own foghorn and there ensued a sort of foghorn conversation to see who had the right of way. Apparently, the ferry lost and the other boat passed by like a shadow in the night. This same painful process was repeated over and over again so that it took a full two hours to cover the distance from Weehawken to midtown Manhattan. And a very cold two hours for the men on deck.

At Pier 90 Third Auxers had their first glimpse of the Queen Mary. There she was in majestic indifference while a dozen little boats scurried back and forth to feed her

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

hungry mouth. Even in her coat of wartime gray, she breathed affluence and splendor. Here was a ship that could transport an entire infantry division! No wonder Hitler had put a special prize on her head.

The ferry tied up and disgorged its cargo. Again, long lines of struggling, panting, stumbling men streamed across the gangplanks. Single file, they hauled their loads up the steep inclines. And this time, they could not stop for breath because each time they put their burden down, they blocked the entire line. It was like Sunday traffic on the freeway.

Once aboard, each man was handed a red, white, or blue card which told him where he would find his cabin, when he would eat, and how he would conduct himself in an emergency. White-helmeted MP's kept the line moving. Down the long companionways, across "Piccadilly Circus," up the winding stairs, to the left, to the right. There was no end to it. Finally, Third Auxers saw their own advance guard and they quickly found their quarters. Majors on sun deck, captains and lieutenants on promenade deck, nurses on main deck, enlisted men below.

The Queen had been ruthlessly cut into. Staterooms were intact but cabins had additional berths along the walls. Below, everything had been removed to make room for rows upon rows of bunks, often in tiers of six and seven. These bunks were really canvas shelves, so constructed that they could be folded flat against the side when not in use. Since each bunk held not only the occupant but also all of his belongings, there rarely was a chance to fold the shelf. The odor of human bodies pervaded the atmosphere. Engineers had installed special air-conditioning equipment, but this was little more than a gesture. With thousands of men sleeping in such a confined space, proper ventilation was a physical impossibility and when half of these men became seasick, the

resulting effluvium was nothing short of overwhelming.

After their first tour of the ship, Third Auxers suddenly realized that they were dead tired. There was a brief conference in Colonel Blatt's stateroom. A room on Main Deck was designated as Headquarters. Third Auxers would run the sick bay and take turns as sanitary inspectors. Schedules would be posted. Then, the overheated atmosphere began to have its effect. One by one, the men were overcome by fatigue. They made off to their bunks and dreamed of submarines, bombs, and mines, little realizing that great precautions had been taken to safeguard them from these perils. The Queen Mary might be a lone wolf but she was by no means deprived of all protection. Her war record was already three years old.

She had come into New York harbor one day in September 1939, seeking refuge from German bombs. Here she stayed until the following spring and here she blossomed out with that coat of gray paint that became her war garb. Her first trip as a British troop transport came in May of 1940. It was a round-the-world voyage by way of Australia and South Africa. This trip was followed by many more from Australia to Egypt. The Queen was carrying Aussies to North Africa.

Pearl Harbor came and barely two months later she sailed from Boston for Australia with 8,200 U.S. troops aboard. This was her first service as an American troop transport. In May of 1942 the monster (as she came to be called affectionately) made her first transatlantic crossing. During the ensuing summer she transported British troops from England to North Africa around the Cape of Good Hope. In the fall she was ordered back to America where she came to grief. On 2 October she was rammed in Boston harbor, not by a German submarine but by the British cruiser Curacao. The cruiser was



The Queen Mary as she looked in June 1945.

sliced in two and the Queen had part of her bow torn away. She was in drydock for two months. Her damage repaired, the Queen had just been put back into service when the Third Aux embarked.

Early on the morning of 8 December 1942, her engines were started on low-water slack, a period of about twenty-five minutes when the tide turns. At five o'clock tugs pulled her away from the pier and a few minutes later she was going down the river under her own power. At eight o'clock when most Third Auxers were still rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, the Queen was in the middle of the Narrows, following a carefully staked-out channel that was swept day and night. It was a clear sunny morning with a tang in the air and a mirror-smooth ocean. At Ambrose lightship the Queen

stopped and the pilot was put off. Once again the Queen was in the hands of her master, Captain Bisset, who ordered her full speed ahead. But full speed ahead did not mean straight ahead. First this way, then that way. Never more than nine minutes in the same direction. As the Manhattan skyline dropped out of sight, Captain Coffey remarked: "Well, I'll be darned! Does the Captain know where he is going or did he have too many drinks last night?"

The Captain knew very well where he was going and he proceeded according to a course that had been worked out into the smallest detail. Each deviation (and there were hundreds of them) was plotted beforehand so that in spite of complete radio silence the ship's exact position was known at all times. The Captain knew where to

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

look for submarines, derelicts, icebergs, convoys, and independent ships. He was told when he could break radio silence, where he could look for surface escort, and what kind of weather he could expect. If the Navy obtained information about subs, this was sent out in coded messages with precise instructions. These were called diversions. There might be as many as six of them on a single crossing. There were diversions to steer clear of submarine packs, of icebergs, and of independent raiders. All this, plus the expert routing, the constant zigzagging, and her great speed kept the Queen safe through five years of war. It is now known that a few German subs did spot the Queen. One of them even launched a torpedo but the distance was too great and the torpedo exploded five hundred yards short of her mark.

Naturally, Third Auxers could not see any of these things when they appeared on deck. What they did see was comforting enough however. Two destroyers raced alongside, a blimp lazied overhead, airplanes circled far and near. Actually, this was the most dangerous stretch of the entire journey because German submarines could predict the ship's location. These waters were therefore the most closely guarded. After a few hours, the blimp dropped out of sight, the destroyers were left behind, and the planes disappeared. The Queen was on her own!

The loudspeaker announced boat drill. Normally, the Queen carries 2,000 passengers but on this crossing the pay-load was 12,000 and it was impossible to provide life-boats for more than 5,000. For the rest there were rubber rafts and life preservers. The life preservers had been distributed with generous hand and no man was ever supposed to be without one, not even in the latrine. The reason was obvious: in case of disaster, nobody would have time to go back to his cabin and retrieve the article. The rule was strict and offenders were punished in a unique way. Anyone caught without

his Mae West had to surrender his shoes on the spot. The shoes were impounded by the MP's and the owner could regain his property only by presenting his Mae West at the shoe store. Many a man could be seen on that first day padding away in his socks over the wet decks and returning meekly with the *corpus delicti*.

One of the first things Third Auxers learned was that if they fell overboard, the Queen was not going to look for them. British crew members obligingly pointed out that the main deck was over fifty feet above the water line and that the terrific concussion usually broke a man's neck. During the day numerous MP's watched for jay walkers but in the black-out everybody was on his own. On a particularly dark and stormy night Captain Hudson went outside, little suspecting how easy it was to get lost on a ship as large as the Queen. Wandering around in the total darkness, he came to a railing, mistook it for a stairway, and slipped through. His only thought was: "Oh God! Help me!" At the last moment he grabbed the railing, steadied himself, and communicated with the Almighty by shouting above the wind: "Never mind!"

Third Auxers quickly discovered that the Queen had been stripped of almost everything except her dimensions. The only fixture that was intact was the famous lounge. The swimming pools had been converted into dormitories and the squash courts into storage rooms. The main companionway was still called Piccadilly Circus but the smart window displays had vanished. The forward bar, once a gathering place for notables, had been transformed into the sick bay. Here, among surroundings reminiscent of former grandeur, Third Auxers took care of sprained ankles, sore throats, and eventually that dread malady, seasickness.

For the enlisted men the journey was marked by great crowding, many restrictions, and much boredom, but for the nurses

## THE NORTH ATLANTIC

and officers, life was considerably better. The Queen still had her full British crew and she was stocked with plentiful supplies from the American quartermaster. Of course, Third Auxers had to suppress their disappointment when they discovered that *bubble-and-squeak* is a breakfast dish of cold cabbage and potatoes. They also had to swallow their words when they found that *trifle* is a huge serving of custard surmounted with fruits and nuts and garnished with a thick layer of chocolate. But these jolts were minor compared with the pleasure of eating from a menu such as this:

Such epicureanism was a far cry from the C rations that awaited the Third Aux in England. This was their last splurge.

Besides eating, Third Auxers took great delight in the other activity of ocean travellers: walking the deck. This was an inexhaustible source of fascination. On a ship the size of the Queen, a man was never at a loss for something to watch. It might be the long green combers, or the turbulent wake, or the gun crews at their posts, or the look-out in the crow's nest, or just the fellow passengers. There were characters of all descriptions. Aussies on their way to England, Royal Navy men en route to a home assignment, merchant sailors repatriating from torpedoed ships, American Red

Cross workers, Canadian nurses on their first mission to the homeland, a whole company of Polish soldiers, a sprinkling of Scandinavian mariners, a lone representative of the Fighting French, American newspaper men, ATS's, WREN's, WAAC's, WAVE's and a miscellany of nondescript warriors. At first it was difficult to mix with all these people. The American Red Cross had taken care of that. With commendable foresight, it had prepared a booklet. Third Auxers learned that they must never use the word "bloody" in the presence of an English lady and that they should never repeat Al Jolson's story about English ale (Al wanted to put it back into the horse). With those subtle hints to guide them, most Third Auxers had little trouble getting along. They listened enraptured to the stories about Dunkirk and the Blitz. They found out that 1400 stands for two o'clock in the afternoon. And they became used to the crisp voice of the BBC announcer who broadcast the nine o'clock news. It was all in the best English style.

While most Third Auxers thus pursued a life of leisure, Headquarters again went back to the task of getting the unit on its feet. There were two big jobs to be finished. One was to draw up a team roster. The other was to evaluate the enlisted men. A reviewing board was appointed by Colonel Blatt and its members spent practically the entire journey at their task. The findings were transcribed on a master sheet that became a constant source of reference. They even produced a bit of humor. When one man was asked what made him think that he would make a good surgical technician, he answered: "I always enjoyed cutting up meat in my father's delicatessen!"

There were many other jobs to do. A dozen Third Auxers were kept busy in the sick bay. Others acted as sanitary inspectors. Still others did deck watch on the

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lower decks. This is how Captain Adams described his tour of duty:

"One night it was my duty to stand watch on one of the decks deep down in the bowels of the ship. There was more vibration down there and the air was poor, being contaminated with the nauseous odors that pervade the inside of crowded ships. It was a group of Negro troops and they passed their time by playing poker and shooting craps. My only duty was to act as benevolent referee and see that no knives were drawn or throats cut. The first part of the night passed quickly enough because of the entertainment provided by the panorama of life about me but when the night was fairly settled and people slept, time began to drag and I could not help wondering what would happen down here, seven decks below, if a torpedo should strike."

During the first two days the weather was bright and the sea calm. The gentle swells barely rocked the monster. On the third day the water became a little choppy and the ship began to roll slowly, with great dignity and regularity. The sky was overcast with a gray cloud and the sea turned a glassy black in which the white, curling carpet of the wake cut a sinister pattern. The Queen was headed into one of the worst storms of her life.

On the fourth day visibility was cut to half a mile and squalls of rain began to strike. Huge, white-streaked rollers crashed down on the bow with such force that life-boats were knocked askew and men were swept off their feet. The howling wind called forth a musical note from every edge, every beam, every exposed object. There was the deep bass of the main shrouds, the wavering tremolo of the halyards, the piercing shriek of the radio wires. A sharp roll of the ship and up would go the pitch to an eerie whistle. The Queen neither slackened speed nor stopped her zigzag course.

The fifth day was the worst. Even the seasoned British sailors stood fascinated to watch the bow go down before each monstrous swell, hesitate momentarily, toss a mountain of water aside, and fight up again for the next rise. The raging wind shook the ship, tore at the lifeboats, whipped the superstructure, and bent the wires on the bridge. Waves rumbled and thundered and crashed mercilessly, white foam sliding down the long slopes. Sometimes there would be a smack or a thud or a crash as the speeding behemoth met the furious seas head-on and took her punishment. Mighty as she was, the waves were mightier. The Captain's log noted that the Queen had heeled to thirty degrees. This was a battle of the giants.

The main damage occurred on the first day before anybody had a chance to brace himself. It happened in the dining room just as the third breakfast shift was getting under way. When the Queen heads into a storm, chairs are battened down and tables are provided with special guards to keep the food from spilling. However, nobody thought of a storm at this time. The Transport Commander, a rotund and dignified man whose table was next to a Third Aux table, came in with his usual swagger and remarked with an expansive gesture: "You medicos may be awfully smart but I bet you don't know that the best treatment for this is a dash of *terra firma* applied to the balls of both feet." He had hardly finished when a huge roller struck the ship. The floor began to heel over, first a little, then more and more, finally to an alarming degree. Dishes clattered on the floor, chairs began to slide, everybody held on for dear life.

But not the great man. He had been so pleased with his own joke that he was still laughing heartily when his chair started out from under him. Down he went, followed by his two poached eggs. Being rotund, he rolled and rolled until he hit the table to which the Third Auxers were clinging. The

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impact left him with a black eye for the remainder of the trip but his immediate embarrassment was somewhat lightened by the fact that the entire dining room was thrown into utter confusion. That one roller cost the Queen a whole carload of china.

That evening, a huge wave stove in a porthole of Lieutenant Tella's cabin. Although this porthole was ordinarily forty feet above the water line, the waves were of such size that water started coming in by the bucketful. The hour was late and the men were asleep. The first thing Tella knew was that there was water under his bunk and he immediately concluded that the ship was on its way down. He jumped up. This was no time to lose his head. Only speed could save him. Mustering all his presence of mind, he woke his bunkmates and told them to put on their life belts.

"We've been torpedoed!" he said, keeping his voice as calm as possible.

"Shall I take my gas mask?" asked one of the sleep-drunk men.

"To hell with your mask. You won't need that in the middle of the ocean."

Water was now ankle-deep and Tella led his men out, prepared to abandon ship. But, instead of seeing the decks awash, he was greeted by a perfectly dry alleyway with an MP looking on as if nothing had happened.

"Which way do we go?"

"Go where?" asked the MP.

"To the boats, of course."

Tella did not need to ask further questions. The expression on the MP's face was enough. Sheepishly the men went back to mop the floor.

Here is what Captain Adams had to say of those days.

"I have no very clear recollection of the storm. The motion of the ship was excessive, driving me and many others to the bunks. There was just the seemingly end-

less passage of time. In the dimly-lit cabin there was no delineation between night and day. Nor was time marked off by the regular appearance of meals because the last thing desired or thought of was food. Time dragged by on leaden feet, one minute giving grudgingly to the next. By lying flat and closing his eyes, a man could maintain some sort of comfort but as soon as he raised his head his stomach would become an empty void. With much gulping of air and marked salivation he would break out in cold perspiration. Then he would lie down again and become one with the motion of the ship, now up, now down, rolling this way, rolling that way.

The elements built up until on the third night the climax came. Sleep was out of the question. The ship would either shiver from one end to the other or it would tremble as the propellers bit into the air. Hesitating on top of a wave the monster would lurch forward into a trough, rolling and swaying as if in a somersault. Wooden fittings creaked and snapped. Steel structures strained and panted. Sturdy bunks moved violently back and forth so that a man had to hold on to keep from being pitched out. Word was brought that harder souls had been tossed around like feathers in the breeze. Chairs, tables, rugs, and men were slapped together in pell-mell fashion. Many were the broken legs, the bloody noses, the sprained backs. We were in a notorious strip of rough water called the Devil's Bowl."

Now the hospital staff came into its own. Patients were admitted by the dozen, some of them so depleted that they had to be revived with intravenous glucose. At the height of the excitement a man was admitted with a diagnosis of acute appendicitis. The operating room was prepared. Solutions splashed. Trays slid. Packs rolled. When Captain Ralph Coffey finally picked up the knife, his footing was so unsteady that he had to hold on to the table! It is

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not every surgeon who can say that he has removed an appendix with one hand.

Finally the storm calmed down. Clouds were still hanging low but the rain stopped and late in the morning of 14 December there rose up, silhouetted against the threatening skies, the tall rock of Ailsa Craig. Gulls began to circle the ship. A destroyer hove into view. Planes appeared overhead. As if to welcome the Queen, a feeble sun pierced the gloom. It was not much but it gladdened the hearts of these travel-weary men.

The Queen threaded her way up the Firth of Clyde. Through the guarded entrance and past the submarine net, she now entered the safe, smooth waters of the estuary. Gradually the day brightened and as it did so, the men caught glimpses of a panorama that was ample reward for the perils they had just withstood.

In the background the gentle slopes of Ben Lomond reached down to the horizon. Along the shores nestled the villages, pic-

turesque villages of infinite charm. Smoke lazied up from chimneys and formed a gentle canopy. Splotches of sunlight darted back and forth. Color was everywhere. Not the dirty gray of the ocean but delicate pastel shades that changed from one minute to the next. How soothing to the eye that has beheld nothing but angry waters.

All around were ships. Sleek destroyers, ready to go into action. Cargo boats, snubbed down at the bow. Submarines, gently furrowing the surface. Aircraft carriers, aloof in pompous indifference. A top-heavy liner, the Empress of China, nearby. And through it all, a multitude of small boats chugging back and forth. Here were dozens of ships that crossed the ocean day in, day out, in all kinds of danger, without fuss or fanfare. Of what use was it to shout out that the Queen had outrun submarines and triumphed over nature? Chains rattled. Anchors fell. The Third Aux had arrived.

There are only a few harbors in the world with piers large enough to accommodate the

The Queen Mary at anchor in the Firth of Clyde.



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## THE NORTH ATLANTIC

Queen, and Glasgow was not one of them. In the absence of these facilities, the ship moored in the middle of the Firth, opposite the villages of Greenock and Gourock. It was late now. Impatient as they were, Third Auxers had to wait till the next day before they could debark. The Port Surgeon came aboard. There was not much that he could tell the men except that life in England was grim. "Better enjoy your fresh eggs in the morning," he said. "They are the last ones you'll eat."

Debarkation started early the next morning. Everything had to be loaded into lighters and then ferried ashore, a round trip of eight miles. One by one, the units lined up. At three o'clock Third Auxers fell in. With one hand on his valpak and the other on his helmet, each man jumped down onto the deck of the lighter. Only Captain Hudson stayed behind. It was his job to supervise the unloading of the bedding rolls. He battled stevedores for a week and rejoined the Group at Oxford. If it had not been for his vigilance, most Third Aux property would have wound up in the Glasgow black market.

Gourock was not a sight to inspire Third Auxers. Rain was again coming down in a steady stream and although the hour was only four o'clock, darkness was already setting in. A mid-winter day in Scotland lasts only eight hours and this particular day was marked by lowering skies and sudden squalls. However, even had the weather been clear there would have been little opportunity for sight-seeing because the ferry station and the railroad station were under the same roof. The waiting room was barren. The restaurant was fresh out of food. The guards spoke an unintelligible language. It was cold, dark, and wet. Third Auxers sat down on their valpkas and began to munch K rations.

Finally, word was given to board the train. And what a train! Each car was cut up into a dozen little compartments with a separate

door to the outside. No lights. No heat. Small wonder that the men cheered when Scottish lasses trundled a huge teapot along the platform and began serving hot tea.

There was only one man who thought he could do without tea. With commendable foresight Major Peyton had put a bottle of ten-year-old Scotch in his musette bag when he left Fort Sam. In spite of numerous temptations, he had nursed his property for just such a low spot as this. This was the end of the travail. Now for a drink. He reached around. The bag was wet! Then the awful truth bore in on him. In the violent agitations of disembarkation the bottle had broken and the precious liquid was now seeping dismally through layers and layers of GI underwear to christen its home soil.

On its arrival in Gourock, the Group was greeted by an emissary from ETO Headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel James B. Brown, the well-known plastic surgeon from St. Louis. Third Auxers were heartened to think that their arrival had been anticipated and they impatiently questioned Colonel Brown.

"When do we go to work, Colonel?"

"Now, don't be too eager. When I got here last summer, nobody knew I was coming, let alone what I was supposed to do. All I did for the first week was to fill out a questionnaire and put down where I had my internship!"

"What is life going to be like in Oxford, Colonel?"

"You are going to do a lot of walking because your barracks are three miles from town. It's the only thing that'll keep you warm."

While this conversation was going on, the train was slowly huffing and puffing towards Edinburgh. Third Auxers did not see this famous city. They were too much preoccupied with keeping themselves comfortable. A man could either go to sleep or keep

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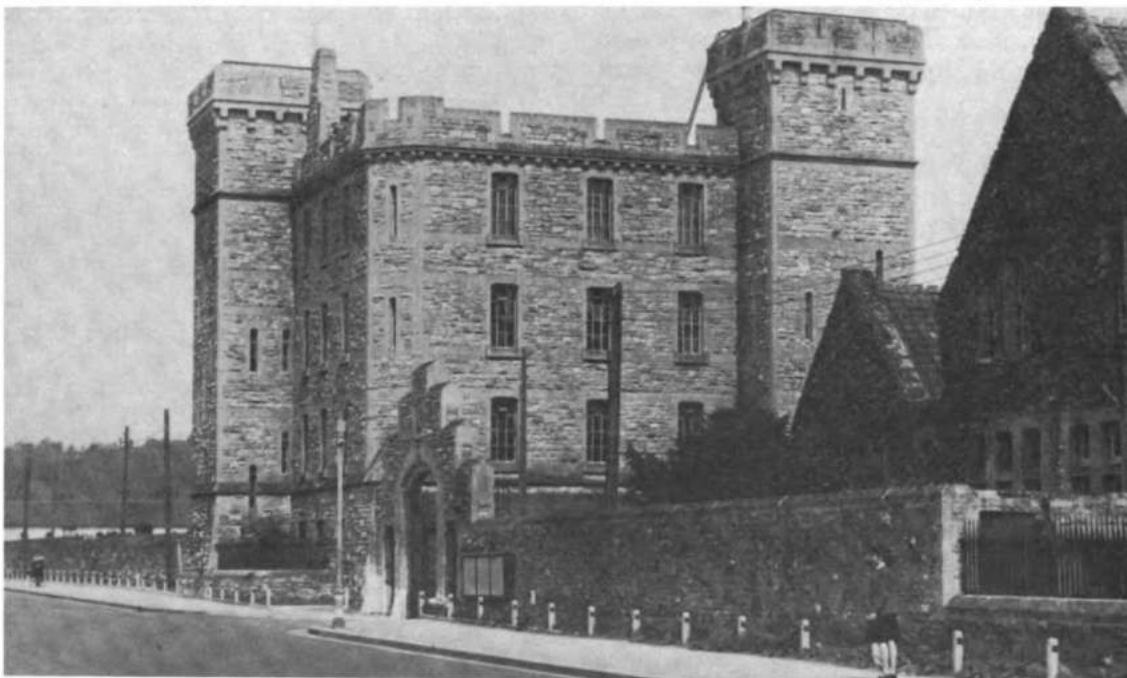
warm. Some sat with their eyes glued to the windows, trying to pierce the darkness. Alas! Their only reward was an occasional glimpse of huge signs reading: IS YOUR JOURNEY REALLY NECESSARY? By morning, every Third Auxer was fully in accord with the English housewife who sat down in a crowded bus and said: "I wish this 'ere 'itler would get married and settle down."

Morning dawned cold and dreary. Then word was brought: "Short stop for breakfast in Leicester!" Third Auxers licked their chops. They hadn't had a hot meal for a day and a half and they had visions of steaming ham and eggs. They were disappointed. "Breakfast" consisted of a cup of weak tea and a dish that looked like meat pie but was actually a mixture of sawdust and horse meat. To forget their hunger, the men began to crack jokes. The most appropriate one was about a Texan who was trying to impress an Englishman with the size of

Texas. "Why, in Texas you can get on a train in the morning and ride all day and all night and all the next day and you are still in Texas!"

"Yes . . . . we have trains like that in England too," was the unexpected reply.

At eleven o'clock the train pulled into Oxford. Buses were waiting, shades drawn. No Nazi spy would witness the arrival of such a supercharged organization as the Third Aux. The shades kept spies from looking in and Third Auxers from looking out and that was a pity because High Street was a fascinating sight. Gothic buildings lined the winding avenue. Slender spires lent enchantment. Ancient archways beckoned strollers. But instead of strollers, there were only bicyclists, all riding in incomprehensible harmony on the wrong side of the street! The buses joined this left-handed parade, threaded their way across Magdalen Bridge, and made straight for a more prosaic part of town. The long journey was over.



Cowley Barracks. What a home for heroes.



## Chapter III

### Oxford



When they alighted from their buses Third Auxers saw a building of crumbling limestone and battlemented towers, nail-studded doors, and mullioned windows. This was Cowley Barracks, home of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, one of His Majesty's most illustrious regiments. Here, glory had resided since time immemorial.

But what a home for heroes! The nail-studded doors were only the beginning. Beyond them lay a veritable maze of dungeons with sagging floors, peeling walls, sooty windows, and miniature fireplaces. Crooked, narrow hallways and winding, creaky stairs led from one cell to another. These cells were so arranged that there was one common entrance for a group of ten. The effect was that of a labyrinth with Third Auxers in the role of rats.

A chill pervaded the atmosphere. What about a fire? Somebody had already located the coal pile. The more practical souls went to work. They measured a fireplace and calculated that it would hold approximately two handfuls of coal. Others started hunting for blankets. They found them in the coal bin. No statistician will ever figure out the number of man-hours misspent in providing warmth for these drafty catacombs. This was Elizabethan comfort.

The nurses fared a little better. They were quartered in Slade Camp, a nearby group of barracks of more recent date. Two ATS

girls had done their best. A roaring fire was going in the mess hall. Beds were made. Halls had been swept. The English girls were overwhelmed by the sight of seventy well-groomed American women. "I say, Peg," said one to the other, "Don't those American girls wear any stockings?" English women had become so used to their cotton stockings that they did not even recognize the sheer American article!

The enlisted men's barracks were across the lawn from the officers' quarters. Two large rooms accommodated the men without much crowding and each room contained an object that was worth its weight in gold: a pot-bellied stove. These stoves did not have one idle moment from the time the Third Aux moved in and they warmed not only the enlisted men but many an officer as well. The designer of Cowley Barracks had evidently worked on the idea that while enlisted men may share their discomforts, officers must suffer individually.

In the few hours that were left before dark, Colonel Blatt started the ball rolling. He selected his Headquarters, inspected the mess hall, sent a truck for rations, and told the mess sergeant to prepare the first meal. At seven o'clock a long line of hungry, dispirited Third Auxers lined up for their first hot chow in two days. One by one they filed by the antiquated stoves to have their mess kits filled with mulligan stew and canned peaches. After this repast, they went back

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to their dungeons through the same rain that had fallen uninterruptedly from the time they set foot in Scotland. Captain Coffey grunted: "Let's cut the barrage balloon cables and let the island sink where it may."

The next day dawned at ten o'clock and Third Auxers tackled the job of making Cowley Barracks livable. They swept the floors, set mouse traps, and pounced on the coal pile. Their efforts were more notable for enthusiasm than discretion. When a British inspector came around a week later and found out that the coal pile was half gone, he exclaimed in great consternation: "My God! That was supposed to last till spring!"

The English in December 1942 had just recovered from the American invasion of the previous summer. These Yanks had gone on to North Africa and all that was left after their departure was the 29th Division and a few service organizations. Colonel Blatt had the happy idea of asking one of the officers of the 29th Division, Colonel Slaphey, to give a talk on British manners and morals. Colonel Slaphey's words were repeated at a later date in *Yank* magazine as follows:

"If the steering wheel is on the right and the car is driven on the left, if Lucky Strikes and Camels have Woodbines and Craven A's for competition, if the people drink tea (pronounced tay), if the coffee tastes like ink, the ink writes like water, and the water tastes like a mixture of iron rust and stale seltzer, then this is England.

If the hot water in the shower room is cold, if the beer is warm, if the door knobs turn to the left, if the national indoor sport is darts, if the stores open late and close early, then this is England.

If the signs read: Drink OXO or BOVRIL, or Use PERSIL, if the movies (called cinemas) show ads on the screen between pictures, if one of those ads reads: Bert the Bike Thief is still about. Have you locked

your bicycle?, if all the people from six to sixty ride bikes and ride like sixty too, if the pedals on your bicycle turn forward and backward, if the electric bulbs have no threads, then this is England.

If the hotels offer you a room with breakfast in bed, if you find a hot water bag in bed, if they serve you kippers or beans on toast for breakfast, if you hear the boys talk about Janet of the Daily Mirror, if the national dish seems to be fish and chips, then this is England.

If they have movies with such titles as 'Money for Jam' and 'Fanny by Gaslight,' if 'She's knocked up' means that she's tired, if they light a fag with what ought to be called a futility lighter, if the soldiers wear stripes upside down, if they call you up on



High Street looking towards Carfax. On the left, University College. On the right, Queens College.

## O X F O R D

the phone and then ask, 'Are you there?', then this is England."

And yet, there were compensations. A city of lovely spires within a ring of green meadows, Oxford possessed enough architectural treasures to fascinate the most untutored. Through the centuries, kings and queens, bishops and cardinals had left their imprint on the city. The glorious reredos of All Souls College, the stunning windows of Merton Chapel, the awesome interior of St. Mary Magdalene, the vast Bodleian library, the priceless Ashmolean museum, these were sights that had no peers.

The city offered more than culture. It offered a glad welcome. Staunch Oxonians had created a hospitality-and-entertainment committee whose job it was to help the Americans discover the warm spirit behind the forbidding exterior. This committee did its job so well that before a week had passed, Third Auxers had more invitations than they could accept. It was one continuous round of teas, lectures, socials, musicales, dances, get-togethers, community sings, and church services. And this was all the more remarkable because food and liquor were at an all-time low. Colonel Slappey had warned the Third Auxers always to bring a supply of scarce articles along when they were invited for dinner. That was easy with sugar and butter but when it came to liquor, Americans had a lot to learn. The English liquor ration in those days amounted to the equivalent of one American high ball a month.

To keep up with the constant flow of invitations, Colonel Blatt appointed Major Hatt as social chairman. A few days before Christmas Major Hatt received a call from the Rector Magnificus of the University. An officer of the Third Aux, provided he be of at least professorial rank, was invited to attend the Boar's Head ceremony. Major Graves was selected for the honor and he was privileged to witness a ritual as quaint

and impressive as Oxford itself. Let him speak for himself.

"When I entered the portico of the fine old building, I had only a very vague idea of how I was to conduct myself, but I was not left in the dark very long. The portico fairly bulged with erudite pedagogs. They were dressed in scholastic togas and I estimated their average age at approximately sixty-five. Surveying this scene of white manes, bald heads, and flowing beards, I became profoundly conscious of my own un-professorial appearance and I tried unsuccessfully to strike a pose commensurate with the occasion. Evidently, my efforts did not go entirely unnoticed and I soon found myself talking to one of these venerable academicians.

My first question was about the origin of the Boar's Head ceremony. It seems that in 1397 the Headmaster of the College, a scholarly but impractical man, had gone for a walk in the woods unarmed except for a copy of Aristotle's *Contemplations*. Engrossed in his book, the good professor wandered farther and farther from home. Suddenly a wild boar crossed his path. The beast charged. Escape was impossible. Then, just as the ugly fangs were bearing down on him, the professor stuffed his book down the boar's throat and the animal suffocated on the spot! In gratitude, the faculty of the college to this day offers a thanksgiving dinner.

While I was thus getting briefed on Oxford's academic history, the hall of the College gradually began to fill. The word hall is somewhat misleading here. It looked more like a cathedral to me. In the soft candlelight, the lofty pillars assumed an unearthly quality and this was enhanced when an a cappella choir intoned a beautiful hymn. Would I be able to hold my own in this rarefied atmosphere? I must admit that I felt slightly uneasy.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

I was introduced to the Rector Magnificus, a dignified man who professed great joy at seeing me. Would I be kind enough to lead the procession? Before I had time to answer, the professors lined up and the Rector gently shoved me to the head of the column. The doors swung open. Down the aisle we went, first the Rector and I, then the professors, and then the choristers in their monastic garb. They sang a chant that has remained unchanged since the original version of 1397. Solemnly and reverently the strains reverberated through the great hall. Step by step we advanced and arranged ourselves about a huge table. This finished the public part of the ceremony. On their way out, the people received a sprig of holly from the Rector as a symbol of the same good luck that saved the professor's life in times gone by.

The dinner which now followed was as elaborate as in pre-war days, the only concession being that venison had been substituted for boar's meat. In the midst of this repast, the doors swung open and an extraordinary procession appeared on the scene. First came a herald, then a group of students in medieval costumes, and finally a giant boar's head on a platter so huge that it had to be carried by four men in very much the same manner as the old teutonic chieftains used to be hoisted on the shoulders of their subjects. The boar's head found its way to a separate table in front of the Rector.

After dinner the party adjourned to the buttery (a place for bottles, not butter) and I felt sufficiently oriented to launch into conversation. It was a bit stuffy at first but I endeared myself to the professors with a question about syntactical resemblances of Old French and Middle English. After that we became fast friends. Dawdling over our wine, we discussed everything from the future of the British Empire to the price of fresh eggs. *The pièce de résistance* was an

enormous gold and ebony loving cup which each guest held up with both hands, while reciting a Latin incantation. My Latin being a bit rusty, the Rector had taken pains to rehearse me and when my turn came, I acquitted myself like the best of them, elegantly and graciously. And so endeth my one and only encounter with the Boar's Head."

From the day they arrived in Oxford Third Auxers had had an inquisitive eye on London. It was not a hospitable city in those days but it held a certain fascination nevertheless and soon became a favorite week-ending spot. There was something for every taste. A few Third Auxers sought out the luxury hotels like the Grosvenor and the Dorchester, others reveled in the glories of



The Chapel at Exeter College, Oxford. It was in such surroundings as these that Major Graves attended the Boar's Head ceremony.

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the National Art Galleries, still others browsed in the old book stores along Tottenham Court Road, and everybody wanted to see the storied spots like Mayfair, Hyde Park, Westminster Abbey, the Tower, Fleet Street, Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, and Big Ben. But the path of the sight-seer was not always easy. Major Graves had this experience.

"After we had been at Cowley Barracks a few days I bought a bicycle and decided that a trip to London would be just the thing. Unfortunately the weather was wicked. Rain fell steadily. Finally on the Saturday before Christmas it stopped. Here was my chance. I packed my musette bag, fixed it to the saddle, and swung out on the great London road. My spirits were high.



Everybody wanted to see Big Ben.

At first everything was fine. Favored with a following wind, I kept the pedals spinning swiftly. Progress was effortless, exhilarating, and yet restful. A bicycle is a wonderful invention. Little cottages and lovely old homes dotted my route. I felt as free as a bird in the air.

At the Chiltern escarpment a dense fog enveloped me. In a short time I was drenched. Visibility was cut to a few hundred feet. I stopped to look at my map. Thirty more miles! Maybe a bicycle wasn't so wonderful after all.

'Can I help you?' came a friendly voice out of the fog. It was a fellow cyclist. I told him of my predicament.

'Better have a cup of tea at my house. You have a long wet ride ahead of you,' he said.

I accepted eagerly. The English have the reputation of being a very unapproachable people but this chap was as genial as any drugstore clerk in America. His spontaneous act of kindness meant more to me than many invitations to the homes of the well-to-do. The tea tasted good. Refreshed, I started on the last lap.

Darkness was almost complete when I entered the suburbs. I had no map of the city but I knew that all roads lead to Piccadilly Circus and I knew exactly where to look for the Regent Palace. Of course, it was somewhat startling to ride along Oxford Street among crowds and crowds of people and yet not find a single light. Suddenly, I felt very cold and very tired. Progress was becoming more and more difficult and it was with great relief that I finally dismounted at Piccadilly Circus and groped for the door of the Regent Palace.

The lobby was crowded. A long line of people were waiting in front of a window that said RESERVATIONS. In wartime London every respectable hotel was booked for weeks in advance! I fought my way to

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the window. The clerk shrugged his shoulders. He was much too busy taking care of his regular customers. I looked around. Not a familiar face. What now? Hesitantly, I went back to Piccadilly Circus, a huge expanse of hostile blackness.

Cabs whizzed by. Busses loomed up out of the darkness and disappeared without leaving a trace. People passed by the dozen, but only as shapeless forms. They talked and laughed like ordinary human beings but they seemed to move behind a heavy curtain. Everybody knew what he was doing and where he was going, except me.

There is something startling about being caught in the blackout for the first time. The sensations are primordial. At first you feel simply annoyed. Well—what of it? There must be *some* place to go. You try to find it, only to stub your toe or turn your ankle. You hesitate and suddenly you feel not only annoyed but abandoned, trapped, forsaken, pursued, threatened, and generally

wretched all at the same time. Yes, it is true. Every evening this great city with all its offices, shops, restaurants, hotels, bars, theaters, and factories goes into hiding like a hunted animal. What price civilization?"

Eventually a friendly Londoner directed Major Graves to the American Red Cross Hotel on Jermyn Street. Third Auxers came to know it well. Later on the Red Cross started many more of these havens all over England. Of the many Red Cross projects, this was undoubtedly the most popular. For the small sum of a few shillings, any GI could have a good meal, a comfortable room, and congenial surroundings at spots like the Swan in Stratford or the Ambassador in Bournemouth.

Finding a meal in London was no job for the uninitiated. Good food could still be had but at a price. By government decree, no meal might cost more than five shillings (about one dollar) and no meal might have more than three courses. Ordinary restau-

Another minor inconvenience was the queue. This is Leicester Square in London.



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rants would serve the "utility meal." At the fancier places, the customer could buy half a meal for his five shillings and then step into the next room for the other half. Or, the menus would be so cluttered with a tax-for-this and a charge-for-that that nobody could figure out what the bill would be.

Another minor inconvenience was the theater schedule. Shows started at six and finished at nine, the very hour when most restaurants would close. Captain Gaynor had this experience.

"I had been to see 'The Doctor's Dilemma' and came out, hungry as a bear. Where to eat? I tried half a dozen places around Piccadilly Circus with about as much chance as a bastard at a family reunion. Everywhere it was the same thing: Come back next week. Finally I grabbed a cab and put it to the driver.

'Take me to where there is food. Any kind of food. Even boiled cabbage and kippered herring.'

He took me to Lyon's Corner House. All I could see in the darkness was a line a block long. But I was so desperate that I took up my position anyway. Half an hour later, when I had finally struggled to a table, the waiter imperiously informed me that it was now after nine and the menu was limited to soup and hors d'oeuvres.

'What?????'

'I'm sorry, sir. Don't you know that there is a war on?'

'Well, I ought to. I sure am a lot farther from home than you will ever be!'

It can be said without fear of contradiction that no Third Auxer ever really felt warm during those first months in England. Even the central heating would do no more than take the chill out of the air. Albert Hall, home of the London Philharmonic, was so cold that most people kept their mittens on during the concerts. The English were used to it. Through generations of ex-

posure, they had become inured to the chilly drafts and constant dampness. But Third Auxers were soft and they were amazed at the actions of the average Englishman who entered one of those grossly overheated and overventilated rooms: he would rush to the window, open it wide, and then poke vigorously in the fireplace to stir up what little warmth was there. Without their heavy underwear Third Auxers would never have survived the Oxford social season.

In spite of this heavy underwear Third Auxers succumbed in alarming numbers to the Cowley sniffles. Within a week ambulances were making regular round trips between the barracks and the hospital. By great good luck the hospital was close by and it was staffed by an excellent group, the Presbyterian Hospital unit from New York City. Far ahead of the average Nissen hut structure in England, this hospital became a sanctuary for ailing Third Auxers. Never were clean beds and warm meals more appreciated.

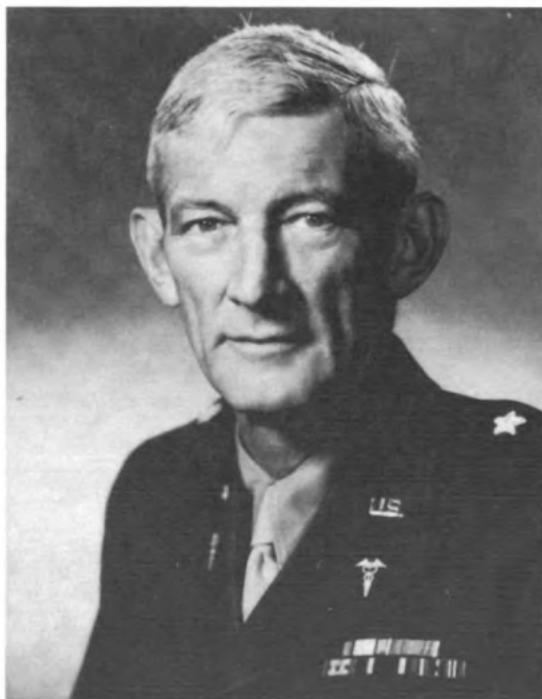
Christmas came. For the majority it was just another cold, damp, dreary night in the Cowley dungeons with a few smoldering pieces of coal for cheer and a chorus of coughs for music. No tree. No packages. No celebration of any kind. The Christmas presents did not arrive until ten months later! The story of these packages is a typical Third Aux SNAFU.

When the Third Aux left home, friends and relatives said: "Let's send the boys a Christmas package." Consequently, thousands of packages followed the Group overseas. Travel for that kind of freight was slow in 1942 but eventually the consignment arrived in England, just after the Group split up. The postal clerks, not knowing one part of the Third Aux from another, forwarded the five heavy sacks to Algiers. By the time they arrived, the Third Aux had left for Tunisia. By the time the sacks ar-

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rived in Tunisia, the Third Aux had left for Sicily. By the time the sacks arrived in Sicily, the Third Aux was back in England. And when the sacks finally arrived back in England ten months later, the contents had been beaten into a pulp. Tobacco, candy, books, shirts, ties, fruit cake, and all the other articles were no longer individually recognizable but formed a sort of *compote à la Third Aux*. It was not the last time that Third Auxers were crossed up by the mails.

After Christmas there began to be a semblance of activity. Colonel Cutler, Chief of the Professional Consultants in the ETO, came to Cowley and infected everybody with his boundless enthusiasm. "Mark my words," he said. "You may feel down and out now but you will be in the thick of it before long."



General Elliot C. Cutler who inspired every  
Third Auxer with his boundless enthusiasm.  
Picture taken in the spring of 1945.

And behold! He had hardly lifted his heels when orders started coming in. Teams went on detached service with the few Army hospitals then available. Individuals went on detached service with British hospitals. A group of twelve officers went to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, a magnificent skyscraper in the American tradition.

And this was not everything. The Plans and Training officer arranged a comprehensive program. Third Auxers listened to lectures by ETO consultants and the internationally famous surgeon, Trueta. They inspected a Canadian mobile unit and went on ward walks with Brigadier General Hugh Cairns, Professor Seddon, and Mr. Pappanacker. They took an anatomy course under Professor Clarke and a pathology course under Professor Florey, the man who made penicillin practical. And then there was the Inter-Allied Medical Conference in London which the Third Aux attended in a body. No, life was not completely sterile.

The nurses too began to stir. They set up a mock operating room, borrowed equipment from the hospital, and started teaching the enlisted men. Here they struck a snag, however. The physical dimensions of Cowley Barracks and Slade Camp (the grounds were large enough to house an entire regiment) were such that housekeeping became a strenuous job. Of the 170 enlisted men in the Third Aux, 30 were needed in the kitchens, 30 for fire drill, 30 for policing, 30 for guard duty, 30 for running the trucks, and 15 were sick. That left half a dozen available for training.

While all this was going on Colonel Blatt hurried over to Cheltenham to find out what the Third Aux was supposed to do. Here in an inconspicuous spot simply called the farm, ETO brass was ensconced in a terraced series of temporary buildings overlooking the pretty Cotswold country. Here General

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Paul Hawley held forth as Chief Surgeon. Here were the men who guided the fate of the Third Aux. Besides General Hawley they were Colonel Cutler, Chief of Professional Consultants, and Lieutenant Colonel Mason, Chief of Operations. These men made a gallant effort to evolve a plan but they were hamstrung by miscalculations that went back to the earlier phases of the war. What were these miscalculations?

In April of 1942 the Allied High Command decided on the principle of a cross-Channel invasion. A tentative target date for this operation, designated as ROUNDUP, was the summer of 1943. The Third Aux was included in the troop list and was rapidly brought up to strength. However, two developments interfered with ROUNDUP. In the first place, the United States did not have the landing craft for the six divisions that would be required. Secondly, because of the deterioration in the tactical situation during the summer of 1942, a diversionary operation was worked out. This was TORCH, the assault on North Africa.

TORCH came off in November 1942. Instead of leading to a swift victory, TORCH became a costly battle in Tunisia. The flow of war materials to Tunisia was such a drain on the productive capacity of the United States that ROUNDUP had to be abandoned. As a result, the Third Aux was at loose ends. Since there was little the unit could do at home, General Hawley was notified to expect the Group anyway and to make the best possible use of it. Colonel Cutler wanted to attach the Group to the British Army in the Western desert but this plan misfired because the Third Aux did not have any equipment. Then General Hawley decided to send one-half of the Group to North Africa and to keep the other half in England.

On 22 December General Hawley wired General Eisenhower that one-half of the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group would be

available for the North African Base Section. On 8 January 1943 General Eisenhower answered that he would accept the Group, provided that it bring its own administrative overhead. On 9 January the Third Aux was alerted. On the same day Colonel Cutler wrote to the Surgeon of the North African Base Section: "There is being sent from this Theater about half of an auxiliary surgical group in the form of twenty teams. Among the Group are many of our best American surgeons . . . ."

On 12 January the official order was issued. The wording of this order later became a source of unending confusion. Suffice it to say at this point that one-half of the Third Aux with its own administrative overhead was relieved from the Services of Supply in England and assigned to the Allied Force in North Africa. This North African contingent was called the Detachment and, by inference, the part that stayed behind was the parent body.

Colonel Blatt selected the personnel for the North African contingent with the utmost secrecy because he realized that virtually everybody would want to be included. At this time Major Harper was executive officer and Major Graves plans and training officer. Colonel Blatt decided to take Major Harper to North Africa and to leave Major Graves as commanding officer in England. On 11 January General Hawley wrote a memo to the effect that in his opinion Major Harper should stay behind. Colonel Blatt answered that the Group in England would be mostly training and should therefore be headed by the plans and training officer. General Hawley acquiesced.

Meanwhile, life at Cowley Barracks dragged on. The rain never ceased. The pall never lifted. The mess hall never lost its smell of decay. Third Auxers grew restless. The Supply Officer had been let in on the secret and he had told a few trusted friends.

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Rumors were rife. To relieve the tension, Colonel Blatt ordered a dance on 4 February. It was a gay party which lasted deep into the night. A few hours later the ax fell. The Third Aux was drawn and halved.

Third Auxers had just six hours to get ready. They pounced on their bedding rolls and they sold their bicycles and they said goodbye to their girls and they lined up in the quadrangle at five o'clock in the afternoon, ready to do battle. Major Graves made the valedictory address:

"To you who are now coming face to face with the enemy, we who stay behind give our fond farewells. We know that you will do yourselves proud. May our reunion take place under happier circumstances."

Six huge, gray buses rumbled up. Colonel Blatt made a final check. All present and accounted for. Gears clashed. Engines roared. Horns honked. The vehicles drew away. Darkness settled on Cowley.

From here on, the Third Aux lived a dual existence: one in England and one in North Africa. To the North African contingent belongs the credit for working out, along with the Second Aux, the deployment of surgical teams at the front. This was a signal contribution which set the pattern for the much larger operations of the future. Therefore, the next chapter will follow the Third Aux into the Mediterranean Theater.



## Chapter IV



### North Africa

Captain Adams has recorded the events of the next few weeks:

"Our flight from England began in the cold, damp dusk of a winter evening, for this move, as most others, was undertaken at night. We left the wet, shining streets of Oxford at the station and entrained in the dimly-lit compartments of a British Railways carriage.

First our gear was stowed as comfortably as possible because we were weighted down with helmets, gas masks, musette bag containing mess kit and toilet articles, and a canteen filled with water. We chugged off into the darkness in holiday mood: whenever a unit moves to a different station, the trip is welcomed as a change in the monotony of circumscribed living. The evening hours passed quickly enough in the give-and-take banter that accompanies high spirits. Speculation was rife as to our port of embarkation. We already had a definite idea that we were bound for Africa.

As the night wore on, some played cards. Others conversed in low tones, subdued by tiredness and the lateness of the hour. Others attempted to snatch a little sleep sitting upright, closely supported by men on either side, but usually jounced awake by the motion of the train. The hours seemed interminable.

Dawn broke about nine o'clock the next morning and the train finally stopped to

let us clamber stiffly down to a breakfast of coffee and sandwiches. We found ourselves greeted by an old friend: it was at Gourock that the Queen Mary had deposited us two months earlier. We hustled aboard a small steamer tied to the quay. The morning was sunny but bitterly cold and gusty with wind. Here we waited again, this time till noon. During the night the wind had blown with hurricane force, fierce enough to cause most of the ships in that snug hill-girt harbor to drift. Two or three of the hulls had actually canted over on the rocky shore. Our own ship had come perilously close to disaster but had been towed back into the harbor in the nick of time.

Finally she was anchored and our lighter slipped down to meet her. She was the Windsor Castle, a two-stacker of the South African mail line, a vessel of roughly twenty thousand tons with the pleasing, graceful lines of a yacht. Once on board, we were assigned our staterooms and quickly sat down to an excellent lunch. We relaxed.

On talking to members of the crew we found that the night had been an exciting one. Trouble started when an anchor chain snapped and the ship drifted rapidly towards the shore, suffering a hole in her bow when she collided with another vessel. At the last moment the remaining anchor grappled onto a heavy electrical cable that crosses the harbor floor at this point and this contrived to halt further drifts. That afternoon most of

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us went to bed to snatch a few hours of sleep.

During the next two days we stayed put, shifting only with the tides. We spent our time looking over our ship, and "we" meant all 2500 of us. She was a commodious, comfortable ship, more approachable and more personal than the awesome Queen. We felt at home. The steward showed us with some pride where new woodwork had been installed in the lounge to cover bomb damage. In this ship, as in the Queen, the top decks were heavy with armament, a reassuring token that she could give as well as take.

Those wintry days bred a penetrating chill and trips to the deck were of short duration. Again we saw the large harbor surrounded by the stone houses of the villagers and herded in the lap of the encircling Scotch mountains. The water was teeming with the traffic of a busy port, swelled to four times its normal capacity by the exigencies of war. The smoke from hundreds of stacks cast a perpetual pall. There were all kinds of vessels around us. Tramps and cargo steamers predominated but there were plenty of lighters, ferries, water boats, oil tankers, inspection craft, motor boats, and supply ships, each like a mother hen with its brood of scampering chicks. There were the palatial ocean liners and the troop transports like our own. There were the men-of-war: snaky submarines, perky destroyers, racy cruisers, and stately carriers. And overhead, the constant drone of watchful aircraft.

We noticed nearby that one of the harbor repair craft was dredging up and down constantly. On the afternoon of the second day the captain on the bridge shouted through a megaphone that his grapples had picked up a heavy mechanical object which, he hoped, would be the anchor and chain lost by the Windsor Castle. It was like watching a play, the *dramatis personae* being very conscious of the stage and determined to put on a good

show. We watched for the next two hours as the small vessel tussled with the great anchor and chain, all to the megaphone-shouted exhortations of her master. When the articles were safely stowed aboard, the whistle blew a triumphant wail and we, the spectators, broke into applause.

One more job had to be attended to: the repair of the hole in the bow. Relays of men working night and day mixed cement to close the gap and thus prepare her for the voyage.

On awakening the next morning we found that we were in motion. We were leaving the snug safety of the firth. By noon the motion increased as we knifed through the ground swells of the Irish Sea. We were taking the most direct route south instead of circumnavigating Ireland.

The next morning found us in the sun-lit open ocean with the air several degrees warmer. Our convoy consisted of five ships and three escort craft. The convoy leader was an old Cunarder, I think the Scythia. There was a top-heavy Dutchman of the Holland America Line and the sleek Monarch of Bermuda. These four, together with a cargo ship, were escorted by three destroyers which darted all around. Every few minutes the ships would change their positions at the signal-flag instructions of the convoy commander. Sometimes we were in two columns, sometimes in three, now we would be heading the convoy, the next moment we would be bringing up the rear. These great liners moved at the will of the small bits of colored cloth fluttering from the mast!

One bright day merged into the next one. Each morning started off with the bass voice of our steward saying 'Top of the morning to you, sir' as he rattled tea cups on a tray for our matutinal delectation. Rise, salt-water bath, and breakfast was the order of the day. After some little time for odds and ends we disposed of the remainder of the

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morning with a boat drill. The rest of the day was S.O.P.: eating, sleeping, reading, card playing, or just plain talking. In this fashion one day slipped into another, each one a replica of the previous one, and each one a little warmer than the previous one. We neither saw nor heard the enemy, but he was never very far. One day we maneuvered and back-tracked unceasingly because of the proximity of a wolf pack of submarines. We made only twenty miles that day.

Towards evening of the sixth day we fetched land and the convoy poured itself into the funnel that is the Strait of Gibraltar. It was a night of breathless beauty, crowned by a deep purple sky with myriads of twinkling stars. On starboard, the lights of Tangiers stabbed into the sky against the background of the shadowy hills. Lights! What a wondrous thing after the completeness of the blackout in England.

On our portside the tip of Spain gave way to the pillars of Hercules, the sugar loaf of Gibraltar being dim, hazy, and mysterious in the eerie luminescence of the moon. Land dropped slowly astern. Once more we sailed into open water. We were entranced. None of us will ever forget the spectacle of that beautiful, moon-drenched night.

Mid-afternoon of the following day brought the distant line of land to view on starboard and the convoy steamed towards it. The rail was jammed with excited people in eager anticipation of seeing a new, old continent. We approached slowly and saw Oran. The buildings started at the water line and climbed steeply up the hillsides, towering cliffs two thousand feet high. Overlooking the city was the white dome of the Church of Monte Christo, while on the highest cliff of all was an old picture-book fort, haloed by white clouds. This was not a fresh, green land but a rocky, inhospitable

The harbor of Oran. This was not a fresh, green land, but a rocky, inhospitable coast.



Original from  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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coast with nothing but dull, gray scrub for foliage.

There was but little land visible. The town was entirely surrounded by hills, ascending steeply in gigantic stepping stones. Only towards the harbor itself did the land slope gently. Here, in the shelter of cement dockways were cribbed about 30 ships, all engaged in the business of discharging war cargo. Our vessel passed these by and steamed towards the better protected harbor of Mers El Kebir, three miles down the coast.

Mers El Kebir is an excellent small port, fashioned by a concrete mole running out from a point that projects half a mile into the ocean. The Windsor Castle threaded its way through a complicated submarine net and to a vacant berth alongside the mole. Here, we were one of many. Ship after ship was snubbed down to the cement, the great hawsers appearing like thin lines in the distance. These ships showed the scars of battle. Some were in fresh paint but most showed the rust and grime and the battering of hostile seas and hostile encounters. There were all kinds of them, from swift torpedo boats to the ponderous battleships Rodney and Nelson. These two vessels had been built at the time of the Washington Naval Conference and the sterns had been amputated just back of the aft mast. They looked strangely unfinished.

It was late afternoon when the Castle finally docked. Word came that we would stay aboard for the night. Everyone was in high spirits for no matter how pleasant the trip had been, we had all been under tension. Thank goodness that the open sea was behind us. That evening we went sightseeing, as much as we could from the deck of the boat. A busy port is always a fascinating sight to a landlubber. However I think that we were more interesting to the natives than they were to us because we attracted more than the usual number of catcalls, arm-

wavings, and yoo-hoos from the shore. Perhaps our nurses had something to do with it.

The next morning we marched off the Windsor Castle, loaded down with everything we had. We assembled in double file: nurses at the head, officers in the center, enlisted men in the rear. Halfway down the quay we ran headlong into the enemy! But no, it was only two photographers taking moving pictures. They stopped grinding as soon as the nurses were past. Evidently, we were not considered particularly photogenic. We weren't even particularly smart looking. We just lugged and dragged our valpaks along and when we came to the end of the quay we sat on them. Was it irony that ambulances were ready to pick us up?

All American troops arriving in Oran were supposed to go into bivouac fifteen miles east of the city on the hillside overlooking the village of Fleurise. This spot, for better or for worse (mostly worse), had been their introduction to North Africa. The GI's had quickly dubbed the place Vino Hill.

We too were deposited on this barren hillside covered with palmetto scrub, rocks, and debris. If the immediate surroundings were dreary, the view of the valley down below was superb. Rolling hills stretched away in all directions, the even rows of grapevines being broken only by an occasional farm cluster with orange and date groves. Soon we were surrounded, not by German snipers but by Arab beggars. They squatted on the ground, shrouded themselves with voluminous folds of dirty garments, and put down their reed baskets. We peeked. Oranges! We had not seen them for months. A barter trade sprung up. Ten oranges for one cigarette. We gorged ourselves.

Except for these oranges, Vino Hill was a wash-out and Colonel Blatt took immediate action. He scurried into Oran, located the billeting officer, and made a deal: the

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officers and nurses could go to Boisseville, a small seaside resort with a number of unoccupied villas. The enlisted men were to stay, in charge of Major Broyles and Captains Ralph Coffey, Plimpton, and Growdon. Colonel Blatt hastened back to camp with the good news.

Thus it was that towards evening our trucks carried us back to Oran and beyond it. The road was fantastic: a narrow, treacherous, twisting ribbon hewn out of the cliff-side. On one side of the road there was a sheer drop of three hundred feet into the ocean and on the other side an equally precipitous wall of rock reaching up a thousand feet. Even in broad daylight I never felt very easy here. In the black-out of that first night it was spine-tingling.

Thanks to our expert drivers we arrived all in one piece and took possession of our villas. Well might we be thankful because we had hardly put our heads down when a storm came up the like of which had not been seen for years. Rain came down in torrents and a gale blew in from the ocean for four solid days. Great, green rollers came smashing at the beach and at our houses. One of them tore down the door of my

house and kept right on going until it hit the basement! When it receded we had four inches of water on the floor but even without that humdinger we would have been soaking wet because sheets of rain hit the house with such force that water was driven right through the cracks. When we went outside (as we had to three times a day to get to the mess) the mud came up to our shoetops. I shall never forget eating with the rain whipping in my face. Our cooks made valiant efforts to serve hot food but their efforts were in vain. My mess kit would be full of water before I was half through.

Such was our dreary situation for four days. And yet we were privileged characters. Weren't we sleeping on cots rather than on the ground? Just think of what the enlisted men went through!"

So much for Captain Adams. The Windsor Castle had done its job well. And yet it had come uncomfortably close to disaster. Intent on saving time, the convoy had not made the usual wide arc around Ireland but had steered through the Irish Sea and skirted the Bay of Biscay. On the next trip German



Vino Hill, covered with palmetto shrubs, rocks, debris, and Third Auxers.

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submarines were forewarned and the Windsor Castle now lies on the bottom of the ocean somewhere off St. Nazaire.

The Third Aux suffered its first casualties not on the high seas but on Vino Hill. Here, while everybody was dissipating his energies on the rocky slopes of the desolate hill, four officers decided on a more promising pursuit, namely a reconnaissance for *vino*. They were phenomenally successful. In the village of Fleurise, a package of cigarettes would buy innumerable bottles of the red liquid. One thing led to another and it was not till late in the evening that a happy but somewhat unsteady foursome began groping a way back to camp. But where was camp? By the uncertain light of the waning moon, one hill looked about like the next one. The men went into a huddle.

"I'm sure it's over there," said Peyton.

"No, it's over yonder," said Serbst.

"Don't fight over it, boys. Just follow me," said Haynes.

"Why be in a hurry?" said Hatt. "I like it here."

And to the tune of "There is a Camp at Haybrook's," he delivered the following immortal lines:

An Auxiliary Group that is known as the Third,

J. Fred Blatt commanding (his friends call him "Ferd").

He gathered his crew from about every state;

Their morals were low but their talents were great.

At Fort Sam they assembled and learned to salute;

They drilled now and then, and they gathered their loot.

Some days they were cold and some days they were not,

But from the latrine all the rumors were hot.

At Dodd Field the boys all lived out in a tent.

The summer passed by and the fall was near spent.

Thanksgiving Day came and the very next day

The post cleared and cheered: they were off and away.

At last for Camp Kilmer they boarded a train

To wallow through mud in the wind and the rain.

In the barracks to brawl and drink whiskey galore

Or steal into Brunswick in quest of some more.

That week seemed a month to the most of the crew,

But one morning assembly was called at H.Q.

Equipment was packed for a transocean trip

And on December the 8th from a port they were shipped.

The crossing on Mary at first was a joy, But later the storm tossed the ship like a toy.

There were some who played poker from early till late

And some kept to bunks while the good sailors ate.

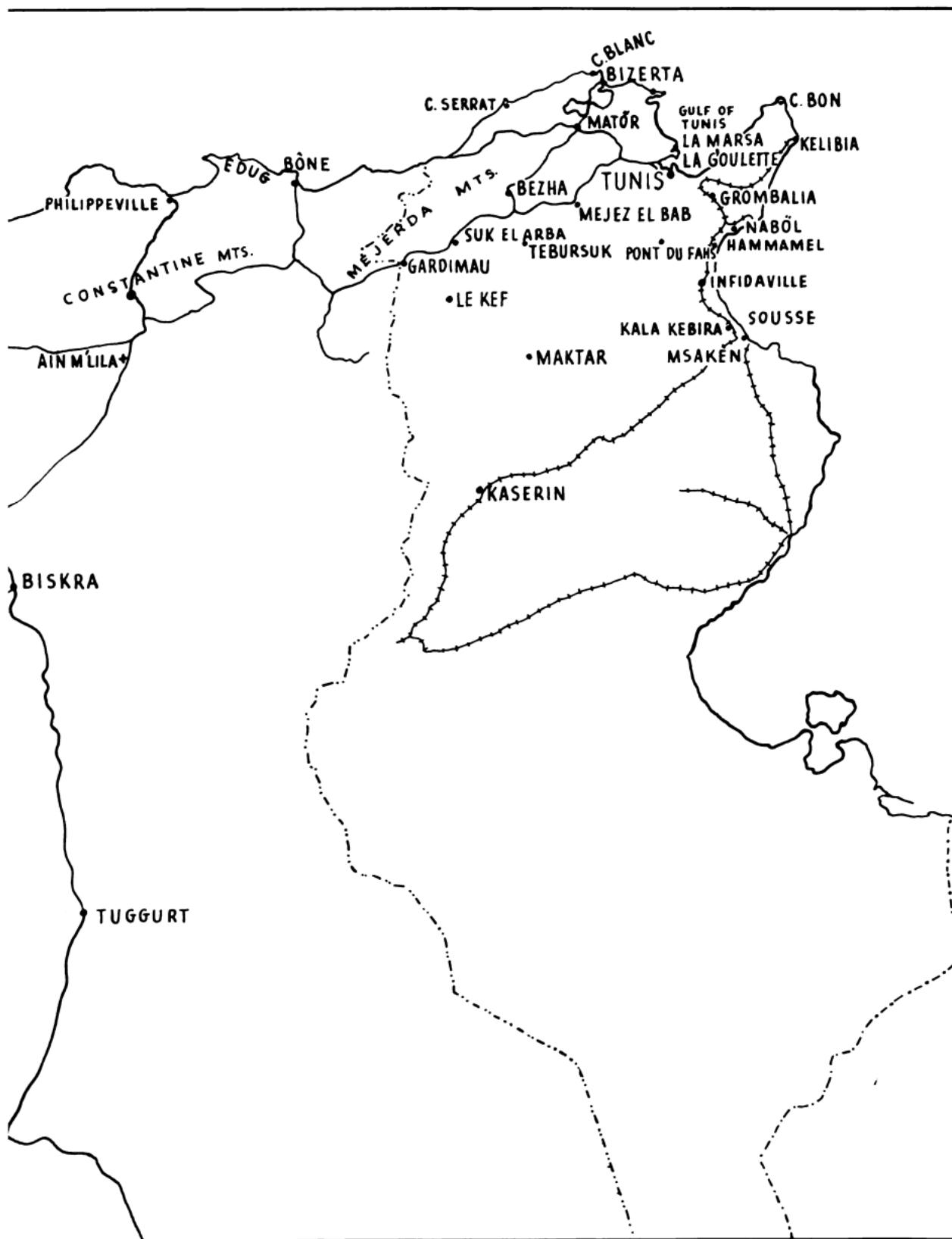
On the shores of the Clyde at last they set foot;

Thence on to Cowley to freeze and breathe soot

From little damn grates in the wall, just a hole.

And with torches all dimmed crawled about like a mole.





## N O R T H A F R I C A

The queue lines, the bicycles, the fog, and  
the grog;  
The mess hall that stank like a quagmired  
hog;  
Professors from Oxford and ETO junk  
Drove some to hard liquor and others to  
bunk.

To split up the crew came an order one  
day;  
Half were to go and a half were to stay.  
There was sadness and sorrow amongst all  
the pals,  
And some Britons were happy to get back  
their gals.

After fifty-one days of distemper and  
gore  
They embarked for a sunbathed North  
African shore;  
And although with the Air Corps our  
nurses did rassel,  
A jolly good ship was the old Windsor  
Castle.

Mare Nostra's warm blue and the lights  
of Tangier  
And Skipper Brown's faith truly made for  
good cheer.  
But a big smile was present on everyone's  
pan  
When the Castle was docked in the Port  
of Oran.

In fair Boisseyville, near Anus El Turk  
There were villas for billets and no signs  
of work.  
And the doggondest things that I ever  
have seen  
Was the Frenchman's idea of an inside  
latrine.

To tents on the hilltop they moved us one  
day;  
The vin rouge was good and made every-  
one gay.  
A Q.M. four-holer and sitting-down mess,  
Oranges, sunshine and fresh eggs, no less.

Ah, the change from old England, with  
its drizzle and beer,  
But they say there's a war on and that's  
why we are here.  
So now let's be off where the 88's roar  
And end this darned song: there just ain't  
any more.

Thus, on 16 February 1943 in the little-known village of Fleurise, the Third Aux acquired a theme song, the Arabs were treated to some genuine American barbershop harmony, and four Third Auxers were happily AWOL. They were the first of a long and distinguished line.

Meanwhile at Boisseyville there was great rejoicing. At last the Third Aux was coming to grips with the enemy. But where was the enemy? About three times as far away as he had been at Oxford! To understand the tactical situation in North Africa at this time it is necessary to review the events since 8 November.

When American troops landed in North Africa, they quickly subdued all resistance. Within three days fighting ceased. The next objective now was Tunisia and the problem was to get there quickly. Both the Allies and the Germans made a dash for it. From Algiers to Tunisia is about five hundred miles. From Sicily to Tunisia is only a hundred and twenty miles. The Germans therefore had the advantage of proximity. They had seized an airfield near Tunis as early as 10 November and they were landing troops a day later.

The Allies did not let any grass grow under their feet. British and American troops reached a point only twelve miles from Tunis on 29 November but they were hopelessly overextended. With their supply base five hundred miles to the rear and in the face of mounting air attack, they had to withdraw to a line running through Beja. It was now the middle of December and the weather became unfavorable for offensive operations. A stalemate developed.

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Both sides worked feverishly at the task of consolidation. At the beginning of the year the opposing fronts ran north to south for two hundred miles from Mateur to Gafsa. There was no continuous front however, but rather a series of strong points. The greatest strength was in the north which was held by the British First Army. In the center and the south, the Americans and the French were stretched thinly over a distance of one hundred and fifty miles.

By the middle of January an American combat team gathered in the Gafsa area and on 31 January this team launched an attack on Maknassy. The attack was only partly successful because the Germans broke through at Faid Pass shortly afterwards. It was this breakthrough that left the American forces dangerously overextended when the Germans came back for their assault on the Kasserine Pass.

The German drive started on 14 February, just a few days before the Third Aux debarked at Mers El Kebir. The Americans at Gafsa were forced back in disorder under an onslaught of one hundred tanks, reinforced by dive bombers. The Americans counterattacked but without decisive gains and the Germans now advanced towards Sbeitla. By 17 February they were threatening the Kasserine Pass and the whole right wing of the Allied flank was in serious danger.

The Germans followed up quickly. If they could seize the Kasserine Pass, the road to Algeria lay open. They made their effort on 20 February. Under the heaviest artillery barrage of the campaign, they infiltrated the American positions and inflicted serious losses. The Americans withdrew.

The position of the Americans was now very precarious. Only one strong point remained in their hands and this was Tebessa. The bombers saved the day. The Americans made a stand and stopped Rommel cold on

22 February. Further north at Thala the result was the same and on 23 February Rommel was through. In eleven days he had gained fifty-five miles but it was a Pyrrhus victory. From here on he was on the retreat all along the line.

The Allies now closed in on Tunisia from three fronts: The British First Army from the north, the Americans and the French from the center, and the British Eighth Army from the south. The Axis forces tried desperately to maintain their positions in the hills and keep the coastal plain safe for a union of their armies. The Allies adapted their strategy to this situation. For a month they simply parried. Then, on 17 March the American II Corps thrust twin spearheads towards Maknassy and El Guettar. It was this action in which Third Aux teams saw battle for the first time.

Let us now return to Third Aux Headquarters. When Colonel Blatt presented himself at Base Section Headquarters in Oran on 16 February, he found to his dismay that his arrival was totally unexpected. Nobody had ever heard of an auxiliary surgical group, let alone know what to do with it. The only thing Colonel Blatt could do for the time being was to establish the Group in a camp commensurate with its dignity. Here, he ran into some real difficulties. To take its place in the combat zone, the Third Aux had to be self-sufficient. It needed what the Quartermaster calls housekeeping equipment. And yet without a table of allowances, such equipment was unobtainable. No self-respecting supply officer would issue equipment without authorization. Colonel Blatt remedied the situation only after much scurrying and scraping. He borrowed tents. He begged transportation. He expropriated mess equipment. And on 20 February the Third Aux took possession of a camp at Ain

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El Turck. Situated a few miles east of Oran, the village of Ain El Turck was neither better nor worse than any of the hundreds of similar hamlets that dot the Mediterranean Coast in this part of the world. Captain Adams has described them well.

"The typical village in French North Africa is picturesque from a distance but disappointing on the close-up. The most prominent building is the town hall, a solidly built structure of cement and plaster with tiled floors. From the flag pole flies the Tricolor of France. The second largest building is likely to be the Gendarmerie or police station with a severe façade and a somber interior.

The main shops are owned by the French, most of whom have spent many years in North Africa. Many were born there. There will be a bakery which is now reduced to making rationed bread. A knick-knack store will probably have a little cheap jewelry, some adulterated perfumes, a few picture postcards, and for the rest empty shelves. There is invariably a barber shop which also caters to the feminine element. You will find a drug store which has a bare minimum of crude antiseptics, dried herbs, and harsh laxatives. It is usual to find several cafes with outdoor tables where the populace sits sipping wine. Lastly there may be two general stores which sell some fresh produce from the farms in the vicinity, augmented by dates and cereals. The French people live simply. Their staff of life is bread, wine, and onions. You will see them sitting outside in the backyard alongside their rabbit hutches and chicken coops. They ask little of life and get what they ask for.

The native quarter is usually on the edge of the village. This is where the Arabs congregate. It is characterized by narrow, wind-

ing streets full of garbage and debris that is thrown there by people who are too lazy to put it elsewhere. There are food shops, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, and perhaps a leather goods shop. Cafes are inevitable and they are well patronized for it seems difficult for an Arab to work after eleven o'clock in the morning.

These Arabs of the coastal range are a degenerate, diseased race with few skills or ambitions. Their religion breeds a fatalism by which they exist rather than live. A wealthy man is permitted as many as four wives and as many concubines as he can support, but most of them are able to support only one of each kind. The women are seldom seen in public. They are left at home or they work in the fields because a woman is an economic asset which must be invested to its best advantage. An Arab usually owns an overworked donkey, a few goats, and some chickens, all of which live with the family in a 9 by 12 yard. The house has one room which is parlor, kitchen, dining room, and bedroom combined. There is no sewage system. Water comes from a common well usually near the place where the human excreta are saved to fertilize the miserable vegetable patches. Transportation is primitive. A few automobiles and buses run erratically on alcohol spirit or charcoal. Horses and carriages are for the affluent. The common man moves on a donkey, on a bicycle, or on foot."

Although Third Auxers now had the basic necessities of life, they were still a long way from delivering the goods. The battlefield was five hundred miles away and the hospitals in Oran had little use for additional personnel. Nevertheless, in the same gesture that had prompted SOS Headquarters in England to put the teams to work, Base Section Headquarters in Oran attached about

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half of the teams to the functioning hospitals. These teams had little opportunity to distinguish themselves.

Nurses were assigned separately. The first contingent to be shipped was a group of fifteen that were supposed to be urgently needed at the 7th Station Hospital. Their orders arrived on 17 February in the middle of the rainstorm. Nothing would do but an immediate departure. The 7th Station Hospital was not far from Boiserville but even a short trip seems long in an open truck over slippery roads through a driving rain. Thoroughly soaked, these nurses presented themselves at the receiving ward. Alas! The 7th Station Hospital had never had less work. However, it was good training for the fu-

ture: always a mad rush to pack up, always a departure in the dead of night or in a driving rain, always a rough ride in the back of a truck, always the same greeting on arrival "Who sent you here? We had no idea that you were coming!"

For the enlisted men the situation was but little better. They did guard duty, worked in the mess, and went on fatigue detail. That was about all. This first month in North Africa was indeed a bitter disappointment.

On 10 March Colonel Blatt had a conference with General Blesse, the Surgeon of the Mediterranean Theater (North Africa had meanwhile become an independent theater). This conference had most important consequences. As yet there were no teams at the



Third Aux nurses in the Mediterranean Theater. Note the unconventional uniforms. Left to right: Gerhard, Andreko, Asselin, Bleau, Bernick, Aird, Niemeyer (chief), Bovee, Parker, Bruce, Benham, Dorton.

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front except for a few Second Aux teams who were roaming the Tunisian hills in desultory fashion. The Third Aux was eager to get to work. The Second Aux had just arrived. General Blesse and Colonel Blatt discussed how to use all this surgical talent.

There were two conflicting schools of thought. The first school held that the teams should go far forward in order to see the casualties early. The second school held that trained surgeons are too valuable to be risked far forward. Consequently the choice lay between (1) sending the teams to the clearing stations where they would see the casualties early but under poor working conditions and (2) keeping the teams back in the hospitals where they would be properly equipped but at a considerable distance from the front.

In the absence of any precedent, General Blesse and Colonel Blatt decided to try both methods. In the Tunisian campaign which was now rapidly taking shape, teams would go forward as far as the clearing station but they would also work at the surgical hospital and the evacuation hospital. In addition, they would be attached to British units to learn from their battle-wise brothers.

Such was the news Colonel Blatt brought back to Ain El Turck and it electrified the men. Life on a North African plateau was rapidly losing its zest. In the words of Captain Adams:

"If boredom and absolute stagnation are to be avoided, a man must make a fetish of matters which ordinarily go unnoticed in the routine of existence. Take for example the airing of a bed. This must be thought about, a day determined, the quality of the sunshine assessed. The sleeping bag is then carefully taken out into the sun and turned in such a way as to catch every available actinic ray. When after a thorough-going discussion the length of exposure has been decided on, the bedding is gathered up in

leisurely fashion and brought in with meticulous care. This constitutes a whole morning's work."

There was only one man who beat the tedium of camp life and that was Captain Hudson. As itinerant teeth extractor, Hudson had his own jeep which was the envy of his tentmates. One day Hudson drove up, parked the jeep in the middle of the company street, and went into the Headquarters tent. It was a golden opportunity. Mischief makers pushed the jeep into Hudson's own tent where it was completely out of sight. Several minutes later Hudson emerged. His jeep was gone! Sympathetically, a fellow Third Auxer pointed out that anybody who loses a jeep is supposed to refund the cost of the vehicle besides paying a stiff fine. Hudson almost had a hemorrhage before he discovered that his jeep was hidden under his nose. From then on, he always chained his vehicle to the nearest tree.

The only extracurricular diversion at Ain El Turck consisted in barter with the Arabs. Here the Third Aux produced a champion in the form of Captain Hagerty who was quickly nicknamed Abdul Akim. His method was to buy wholesale and sell piece-meal. Business was brisk but on the whole Third Auxers were the losers. An Arab is a hard man to beat on his own ground.

All this changed when Colonel Blatt came back from his visit with Colonel Blesse. Great was the excitement. A few days later the first teams to go to the front were announced:

Major Francis M. Findlay, Capt. Marion E. Black, Lt. Wentworth L. Osteen, T-5 Harold J. Meinz, T-5 Allen A. Ray.

Major Watkins A. Broyles, Capt. Philip F. Partington, Lt. Rocco Tella, T-5 John S.

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Page, T-4 Clifford C. Inman, T-4 Dan Overly.

Capt. Ralph R. Coffey, Lt. John A. Groudon, Lt. Maurice Schneider, T-4 Clarence Moody, T-4 James Battles.

Capt. James J. Whitsitt, T-5 James C. Fish, T-5 Claude W. Thomas.

Colonel Blatt personally briefed the men: "You are to report to Headquarters II Corps, somewhere in the Tebessa area," he said. "Better bone up on your hasty entrenchments. There's a shooting war on over there."

Then Captain Bauerle, the Intelligence Officer, stepped forward. With his usual dead-pan, Bauerle delivered the *coup de grace*:

"And when you are captured, all you can give out is your name, rank, and serial number."

There was a moment of silence. The men were visibly shaken. Then Tella inquired:

"Yes, sir. And do we get a letter of introduction to the Germans at the same time?"

On 18 March the teams reported at the Operations Desk of the Oran airfield. The lieutenant on duty shook his head:

"Yes, we can let you have two C-47's but we have no fighter escort and I don't know how far forward we can go."

"That's all right," said Coffey. "As long as we go in the general direction."

The planes taxied up.

"Say fellows! Do you see the name on that plane?" said Tella. "Cold Turkey. Sounds bad to me."

"A bad omen," came Broyles.

Bad omen or not, the trip was miserable. The pilots sought safety at treetop level and they hedge-hopped all the way. They clung to every hill, every valley, every feature of

the terrain. Up and down, to the left, to the right, it was like dodging traffic on Broadway. Before long, Third Auxers were sick as dogs. Finally the ordeal was over and the planes came down.

"Where are we?" asked Coffey.

"Constantine."

"Constantine? That's a long way from Tebessa, isn't it?"

"Well, it isn't exactly next door, Captain, but we can't take you any farther without fighter escort."

Coffey's blood began to boil. Here he was on his first mission, stymied because his pilot was faint of heart. Was he going to be thwarted this way? Hell no! The teams simply had to get on. Drawing himself up to his full length, he imperiously addressed himself to the pilot:

"Lieutenant, I presume you know your business. I am fully aware that we are running a considerable risk in going to Tebessa but I also know that at this very moment American soldiers are dying for lack of medical attention. Do you want to deny those soldiers their chance to live?"

The pilots looked at each other somewhat sheepishly.

"All right, Captain, jump in. We'll take you."

On they went, heading straight for Messerschmitt lane. Less than an hour later the planes came down again, this time in the middle of nowhere. The area was completely deserted. The men got out.

"Where are we now?" asked Coffey.

"About ten miles from Tebessa. And you're damn lucky you got here. Good-by."

The pilots gunned their engines, the planes took off, and the Third Auxers looked around. If this was the front, it was a very lonely place indeed. Nothing but rolling hills, barren plains, and leaden skies. There was absolutely nothing to indicate human

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activity. Not even so much as a tent. It started to rain. Soon the men were transformed into something resembling a wet sponge.

Coffey took his bearings. There were no stars but he had a keen sense of direction. Taking three others with him, he started out through the trackless waste. Eventually he found a trail which became a dirt road. The road led to some railroad tracks and here, in a small shack, Coffey found a detachment of Signal Corps men.

"Sergeant, we are looking for II Corps."

"Sir, the last time I tried to get them it took six hours."

"Better get on that line right away, sergeant."

Exhausted, the Third Auxers sprawled on the ground while the sergeant got busy. II Corps was at Youks-les-Bains, about ten miles away. A truck was dispatched. It arrived in the middle of the night. The men piled in. They went to Youks-les-Bains, reported to the Corps Surgeon, received instructions, and went back to pick up the others, all in a driving rain. It was a night such as one wouldn't wish on his worst enemy.

Major Findlay took his team to the 16th Medical Regiment at Sbeitla. Captain Coffey took his team to the clearing station of the 51st Medical Battalion at Gafsa. Major Broyles took his men to another clearing station of the 51st Medical Battalion at Feriana. Second Aux teams were already at work at these clearing stations but they were desperately in need of relief. Third Auxers rolled up their sleeves. The date was 20 March.

Of this first run, Captain Growdon later wrote in his diary as follows.

"The 51st medics were set up in an old French hospital near Gafsa. We arrived on 22 March and found the hospital swamped. There was one team of the Second Aux at

work but they had a backlog of 79 patients! We went to work immediately. Just behind the hospital was an ammunition dump. We were told that the dump was a nightly target for Nazi bombers and sure enough, Charley came over. Ralph Coffey had just finished a case when the first bomb dropped. He was getting some plaster ready for my patient when the concussions rocked the walls. I thought the place was going to blow up and ducked under a table, although I don't know what protection that would have been. When I looked up, I saw Ralph standing over me, plaster in one hand, helmet in another.

'Which do you want?' he said.

'Helmet.'

'Okay,' he said. 'Come and get it.'

I crawled out. I never saw a man as calm as Ralph.

A few days later Maurice Schneider, our anesthetist, became ill and we sent back to Broyles' team for Tella. Tella thought that Schneider had been killed in action and he went to Gafsa expecting the worst. We soon set him right and he proved himself equal to the occasion.

Casualties continued to pour in. After a while we discovered that we could work two tables if we had an extra anesthetist. Consequently, we sent back for yet another man. Serena was picked. Knowing that Schneider had lasted just three days and Tella two, Serena thought: 'What is this? Open season on anesthetists at Gafsa? God forbid!' He left his station convinced that he was on a suicide errand. Words cannot describe his relief when he learned the true situation."

Back at Ain El Turck life soon reverted to the usual routine. From Oran to the fighting front was a distance of five hundred miles. Obviously, this was much too far. A move was in order.

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**Between Oran and Constantine lies the Grand Dorsal, a steep mountain range intersected by deep, knife-like gorges. This is a scene near Mascara.**

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Arrangements began early in April. Colonel Blatt wheedled 18 trucks from the Quartermaster. Roads being what they were, the plans called for a three-day trip. An advance detail left on 5 April, the main convoy the following day.

Between Oran and Constantine lies the Grand Dorsal, a steep mountain range intersected by deep, knife-like gorges. Over these narrow, twisting, dusty roads, the trucks made slow progress and everybody breathed a sigh of relief when the convoy pulled up for its first bivouac near Orleansville. The area seemed ideal. There wasn't a human habitation for miles around. However, if Third Auxers thought that this gave them protection from the wandering Arabs, they were mistaken. Before the sleeping bags had been unloaded, the first Arabs were already beginning to infiltrate and by the time supper was ready, there were swarms of them. These Arabs had just one purpose: to snoop and to steal. And they were past masters. They would hide under the trucks, inside the trucks, and even in the latrines. No one was safe. It was nothing for an Arab to sneak into a tent, open up a bedding roll, help himself to what he wanted, and steal away. Even officers had to do guard duty!

The second day was like the first. The country became more mountainous. At night the convoy drew up in a vineyard near the village of Arba. The bivouac site here was on a steep slope and many a man who spread his sleeping bag at the top found himself at the bottom when morning came. In spite of such handicaps, Sergeant Montgomery had a steaming hot breakfast ready. He kept his ranges going even while the trucks were rolling.

The third morning dawned clear and cold. The road now entered the most rugged stretches. There were detours, wash-outs, blown bridges, and steep passes. At nightfall the trucks were still a full sixty-five

miles from Constantine. Colonel Blatt decided to push on. Had he known the condition of the road he would have hesitated. Traffic was single lane. Roads were little more than tracks. Darkness settled. The only guide was a dimmed-out tail-light. Signs began to appear: TRAVEL AT YOUR OWN RISK, YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED, and THIS ROAD UNSAFE. Third Auxers who went back the next day marveled how the drivers had managed to stay on a road beset with narrow trestles and vertical cliff sides. It was a hair-raising experience. But finally, nine of the trucks arrived at Ain M'Lila, the new camp. Then Colonel Blatt made a sickening discovery. The other nine trucks had disappeared! There was only one plausible explanation: These trucks had come to grief. They must all be piled up in one of the ravines.

The fears proved to be ungrounded. The tail end of the convoy had become lost in Constantine. All night they drove around in the blackout and they only made their way to Ain M'Lila with the aid of a native guide. Colonel Blatt opened his third package of cigarettes. At least he still had an outfit to command.

Life was not bad at Ain M'Lila. The country was hilly with more vegetation than around Oran and the altitude made for a crisp, invigorating atmosphere. Constantine was an ancient metropolis in a fascinating setting. In the opposite direction was the Sahara Desert in all its awesome vastness. Many other units were bivouacked in the vicinity and more were arriving every day. The Third Aux settled down once more. An officers' club got under way. 'Abdul Akim' set up shop. Black-market restaurants in Constantine did a land-office business. A dinner of rabbit or goat or chicken with plenty of eggs and plenty of vino came to about twelve dollars. Even so, the men kept their eyes fixed on Tunisia where the Axis Armies were now rapidly being herded

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into a corner. Colonel Blatt wanted his teams in on the kill. The only way he could do it was by attaching them to British units.

Except for the two neurosurgical teams which had gone to work in the Constantine area in March, no further teams were dispatched until well towards the end of the campaign. On 24 April, seven teams went north to be attached to the British 97th General Hospital. On 2 May the six remaining teams went to the Souk El Khemis area to serve with other British general hospitals and with the 159th Field Ambulance and Casualty Clearing Station, the equivalent of an American evacuation hospital. Meanwhile the five teams that had been flown to Tebessa on 18 March finished the campaign partly with the 48th Surgical Hospital and partly with the 16th Medical Regiment at Tabarka.

Only seventeen nurses saw action in Tunisia. Fifteen were rushed to Beja on 8 May to help at the 38th Evacuation Hospital and two nurse anesthetists served with the 15th Evacuation Hospital. The remaining nurses served with station hospitals where they practiced mostly patience.

The final phase of the Tunisian campaign took place in the northeastern corner of the country where Von Arnim and Rommel had managed to join forces. Their total strength was approximately 15 divisions. The Allies had approximately 18 divisions of which roughly two-thirds were British and the remainder American. There now took place a rapid shift. The American II Corps, which had been active in the center, was sent north to Sidi Nsir with Mateur as its objective. The British First Army was sent south to Medjez El Bab with Tunis as its objective.



Life was not bad at Ain M'Lila. The nurses go partying. Left to right: Van Straten, Nace, Bernick, Kirschling, Benham, Radawiec.

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These two sectors presented the most difficult terrain. In the extreme north there was a French task force advancing towards Bizerte. The southern end of the line was held by the French and the British.

While the British laid siege to Enfidaville, American troops pushed forward along the Mateur road and assailed Jefna. A second column seized control of Sidi Nsir. Here, during the last few days of April there ensued a fierce struggle for the Jebel Tahant, better known to Americans as Hill 609. The Germans were strongly entrenched on the commanding height and they could be dislodged only in hand to hand fighting. Hill 609 fell on 1 May.

This victory was decisive for the whole sector. Jefna was outflanked, Mateur fell on 3 May, and the Axis line crumbled. On 6 May a two-pronged drive got under way: the British advanced on Tunis and the Americans on Bizerte. These cities fell on 7 May. On 9 May the remnants of two Nazi divisions surrendered unconditionally to the Americans at Bizerte. The rest of the Axis forces further south tried to retreat toward Cap Bon but British tanks cut them off. On 12 May all organized resistance ceased.

Throughout the Tunisian campaign the lack of transportation weighed heavily on the Third Aux. Every team move became a complicated maneuver with long delays, last-minute cancellations, and interminable waits. Let us listen to this story of Captain Adams.

"Our teams had been alerted. Immediately all was bustle. Soiled laundry was gathered up, equipment was checked and polished, bedding rolls were packed and unpacked. Here was purposeful living once more. On the appointed Wednesday we were ready and full of fire. As the after-

noon passed into evening we were still waiting around, our enthusiasm tempered by the thought that after all we were a part of the Army. Our lives would have to mesh with the gears of a great and complicated machine. Tomorrow we would surely move. Thursday came and went, leaving us sitting on our cots, our hope turning to hopelessness, but it did bring us the information that our orders were through and that we were awaiting a hospital train. It was thought that the train would move the following evening. By Friday we had resumed our accustomed lethargic state when a terrific cloudburst made us all but forget the impending trip.

Thunder rumbled in the distance. The sky blackened. The wind began to blow in whorls, picking up funnels of dust which danced and snaked and finally whirled away into the distance. Rain came down in torrents for two solid hours. At times the drumming on the tent was deafening, as hail stones the size of moth balls bounced white on the sodden red earth. Before long our hillside was covered with a two-inch layer of muddy water, each pelting drop raising a small geyser. There was a two-foot gully which ran down the hillside near our tent. From the half-open flap we watched this become a rushing torrent and spread out into a miniature lake a hundred feet below. It engulfed a tent whose occupants came trooping out, shovel in hand, to deepen the surrounding trench. But there was no more chance of success here than there was for old King Canute when he ordered the waves to stop at his feet. A truck was mired up to its axles. From the snug dryness of the tent we watched the storm pass in front of us and finally expend its power upon the solid mountainsides across the valley.

After the rain had fairly stopped we were overwhelmed with inquiring camp mates. We were entirely unaware of the reason for their solicitude at first, but we soon found

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out that they had been watching our tent from a vantage point behind us from which it seemed as though the rising river of water had washed through our tent. Far from being concerned about our lack of dryness they were settling their bets that we had been washed out.

All Saturday morning the sky was full of drizzle. Footing became precarious. It was necessary to take small, slow steps to keep from sliding. The soles of our shoes collected great clods of mud until the sheer weight and bulk of the clod made walking impossible. It was in this extremity that we heard in midafternoon that we were to be entrained that same evening. The camp became alive with the bustle of packing, taking down of tents, and the au revoirs of those who were left behind.

We drove in blacked-out trucks to the unlighted station, arriving in ample time to catch the hospital train at ten o'clock. Shortly after that hour the station master came to tell us that the train would not appear until eleven. We stood around the small waiting room amid the glow of cigarettes with banter and small talk filling the air. Fortunately it was too dark to see the floor, for besides its accustomed layer of dust and litter we had added many a chunk of dirt from our mud-caked boots. Thus, another hour passed.

The station master now informed us that the train would not be in until midnight. We settled ourselves once more, refreshed with a sandwich and a pot of coffee that a thoughtful mess sergeant had sent down. After the long, slow hour of midnight had tolled by, the station master confessed that he did not know when the train would appear and that we had best make ourselves as comfortable as possible. Most of us took off our gear and stretched on the floor or on the few available benches. The talk died down. The hours dragged by. Being unable to sleep, I wandered around and found a

poker game proceeding under the dancing shadows of a lantern. The French station master was there with an English transport officer and three American officers. I watched the play until about three o'clock. A train came panting into the station. Everybody roused up. Our hopes were soon dashed. This was only a freight train. The engineer was able to tell us however that the hospital train had been scheduled to leave Algiers an hour behind his train. This was definite news and so with returning hope the time passed a little more quickly.

It was half past four when a rumble of steam and carriages proclaimed another visitor to the station. We could see the red crosses on the white squares in the half-light and this time we would not be denied. There were complications though, for the train master had no orders to pick us up and thus had made no provision. We persuaded him that we had A-1 priority and he emptied a few compartments into which we crowded.

As dawn came over the mountains we steamed into a rising sun. Noon brought us to Guelma. There we found Colonel Poston awaiting us with an ambulance which took us to the British 97th General Hospital. We lunched and settled, pitching our tents on a slope facing a magnificent mountain range. In the late afternoon Colonel Atkins showed us the tent hospital. It was a well-managed plant of about a thousand bed capacity. A convoy of casualties was expected that evening. The colonel assigned us wards and reviewed the procedure to be followed. He was a fine, well-spoken chap who had spent a week at the Lahey Clinic on a trip to America and had also spent some time in Baltimore. That evening the convoy arrived and we started our rounds. At the same time Colonel Poston received a telegram. We were urgently needed forward. After a few hours of sleep we were up at dawn, repacked our duffle, and struck our tents. Everything was stowed on ambulances and away we

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went, riding atop our baggage. Soon we were tossed around on top of an assortment of barracks bags, cots, tents, blankets, duffle, and what-nots of all kinds.

It was a hot, bright sun that beat upon us that morning. As the vehicles climbed higher and higher, the sun climbed higher too, but while its traverse was straight, our pathway was a twisting, tortuous, hairpin ribbon of dusty road. Every passing conveyance on that well-traveled highway was encased in a moving column of dust which settled on clothing and skin, irritated the eyes, and choked the nostrils.

By midmorning the inside of the ambulance was as hot as a furnace and over the protestations of the driver, whose rules called for the doors to be closed, we swung the doors wide open. This permitted a little more air to circulate and consequently more of the choking dust to enter, but by this

time our senses were scarcely able to appreciate the difference. The scenery was good but not grand, hardly sufficient to make us forget our discomfort. At one o'clock we came to a halt in Souk Arras where we were told we could eat at the Hotel Orientale.

Normally we would not have given this dog-eared hostel a second glance but under these circumstances it became an oasis in a land of sand. Its plain, square, high-ceilinged room was cool and the air was clear of dust. We had a surprisingly good meal: soup, roast pork, vegetables, green salad, and a dessert of fresh fruit, all washed down with *vin rose ordinaire*. Five of us matched coins to see who would pay for the food. Reginald Rilling lost. We were loath to leave the comfort of the inn but we had to push on.



Third Aux nurses in the Mediterranean Theater. Henry, Isobel Johnson, Harper, Grimes, Estes, Doty, Jessop, Ford, Kirschling, Laden, Ferber, Keyes.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

As the afternoon progressed the traffic became thicker. We descended into a broad, flat valley. Signs of war multiplied. Airplanes droned overhead. Guns and tanks were added to the never-ceasing traffic. Our vehicles joggled, jostled, bumped, and groaned along. Finally we came to a stop in front of the monastery which was our destination.

We forced our cramped limbs into unwilling motion. The commanding officer gave us an incredulous look. We must have been an unlikely lot under the cloaking mantle of dust. His welcome was genuine however because these doctors had been working for thirty hours without rest. While we dawdled in the railroad station they were working their hearts out. Their eyes were red and their legs bound up to keep the swelling down. There is no topic to the human mind like the knowledge that one's skill and ability are being sought. Though tired in body, we were exhilarated because here was the fulfillment of our African destiny."

After the fighting ceased Third Auxers relaxed. With the tension off, many of them now had a chance to look around and see what the war had done. Here again, Captain Adams proved himself an articulate observer.

"For several days and nights we had stayed at the grim task of caring for the wounded, probing for jagged steel, tying spurting arteries, closing torn chests, repairing lacerated organs, or just giving a hypo and a word of encouragement to those who were beyond help. After this sorry business the fact that hostilities were over brought joy to the heart and a lift to the step. It was in holiday mood that five of us climbed aboard a truck and

started out from our monastery in the cool of an early morning.

Soon we found ourselves in the middle of a vast traffic. Opposing us was a constant stream of vehicles billowing thick clouds of dust. Jeeps in jaunty disdain of more cumbersome vehicles. Truckloads of soldiers, well pleased with the task just done. Trailers filled with duffle. Guns of all kinds, lugged by squeaking tractors. Small, sleek field-guns, mounted on two-wheeled chassis. Large howitzers, their snubbed snouts pointing skyward. Huge 155 mm cannon, hauled slowly by laboring half-tracks. Armored cars of all kinds. And convoys of POW's. Mostly these men were quiet as though not quite understanding what had happened to them. Occasionally an arrogant group would come along, singing the songs that have primed German youth for war. Watching the procession impassively from the roadside would be small groups of Arabs, squatting on their haunches, holding up two fingers in a begging gesture, offering an egg for barter, or just plain loafing (as their forebears have done for thousands of years) while their miserable donkeys shake off the pestering flies.

My general impression was one of orderly confusion. Confusion of loud and raucous men, of loud and raucous machines. It was orderly partly because of the MP's but more so because of the signs: ENEMY MINE FIELDS CLEARED TWENTY FEET ONLY. Many were the holes where incautious wanderers had set off mines.

From the top of the hill the roadway hairpinned its way into the terraced town of Beja. From a distance it looked like a fairy town of white houses, the contour broken only by towers and minarets. On the left was a large tile-roofed building with two red crosses. As we got into the town, it lost its charm and became a dirty, squalid, soiled collection of houses so typical of North Africa. On the outskirts thronged

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the Arabs, unmindful of the hazards of traffic, safe under the protecting will of Allah. Every house showed bullet holes. Many were demolished entirely and the church tower had a large hunk taken out of it. A garage had one side blown out and was roofed only by twisted, broken girders.

We made our way along the plain towards Bizerte. By the roadside was a cluster of tents amid neatly stacked piles of ammunition. Further on we saw a repair depot with hundreds of vehicles in various stages of repair. The miles passed by. In an olive grove were lines of trucks beside stacks of green-colored cans. This was a fuel dump, the very lifeblood of modern armies. Off to the right was a collection of barns, here too with a waiting queue of trucks. The pasteboard boxes looked familiar: Spam!

Do not expect in these times to find an army spread out in splendor before you. Self-preservation demands dispersal. These small groups are knit into a powerful army only by the slender threads of telephone wire.

In the plain of Sidi Nsir was more telling evidence of the tank battle. At a bend in the road we were startled by a collection of four demolished German tanks. Three of them were medium MARK IV's. One lay trackless, its guns awry. Another was decapitated, its turret and gun in the roadway. Leaning against it was a third, canted over on its side. In the ditch was a huge MARK VI, its vent open to the sky and its steel arms in the air as if clawing at a merciless enemy. We stopped a moment to snap a picture and talk with three British colonels who were examining the tank with calipers and measuring devices. On we passed. Every hillock now seemed to be crowned by a blown-up tank, burned-out vehicle, or cracked cannon. In the next hollow we saw the skeleton of a plane and by the roadside

two small white crosses. The gods of war are insatiable.

We now left the battle-scarred valley behind and crested the hills to come at length to the rolling country around Bizerte. This was once a populous, beautiful city. But no longer. Never have I seen such sweeping destruction. Windows were empty of glass. Pillars and walls were broken. Rubble lay everywhere. Steel and wires were inextricably tangled. Every house lay gaping to the sunlight and bared to the four winds. Hardly a stone was left unturned. Bizerte was a deserted city, peopled only by ghosts.

One view of the wrecked city was like any other, so we wasted no time and pushed southward towards Tunis.

Ten miles out we passed long lines of refugees. Wagons were piled high with household goods and laughing children. Horses were urged on by the barks of excited dogs. Donkeys trotted by, their Arab masters swaying precariously atop the hindquarters. Many were the horses carrying three riders, together with pigs, chickens, and household impedimenta. And there were those who traveled the long way back on foot, clutching whatever treasures they had salvaged.

In the distance was a great cloud of smoke. It came from a barbed-wire enclosure stretching away on either side of the road. Prisoners of war! On one side were the Italians and on the other side the Germans. They had to be separated to keep them from coming to blows. The ground was entirely covered by tired men, sprawled out, smoking, silent, still, and glum. There were I don't know how many thousands of them, all watched by a handful of guards. A line of trucks was waiting to carry them to rear areas. As each area was cleared, the stubble was fired so that the trash and litter would be destroyed.

At Abiod I stopped a sentry to inquire the way. Half a dozen soldiers at the crossroads

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were holding two nondescript characters dressed in the tattered clothing of Arabs. These men had the fair skin and blue eyes of the Nordic race and furthermore they were wearing the heavy black boots of the German infantryman. The soldiers were sure that they had captured enemy spies. I very much doubt if these prisoners saw the light of another day.

In the late afternoon we approached the outskirts of Tunis and turned off for Carthage, the old Phoenician town which now is a residential suburb. Carthage was a beautiful village of houses and villas, untouched by war. The climate is kind here and all varieties of flowers grew in profusion on terraced gardens. We made at once for the beach, had a refreshing swim in the ocean, and ate our supper. The moon came out. We curled up in our sleeping bags and slept the sleep of the just. What a luxury!

So we thought, until awakened at one o'clock by a patter of rain. We grabbed our clothing and bedding and retreated to the shelter of the truck where we slumbered fitfully for the rest of the night on the unyielding boards.

The next morning the sun was shining once more. We stopped in the city of Tunis and looked around. It seemed like any other city. The streets were filled with soldiers of all Allied forces and progress was difficult. We had soon seen all we wished and drove out as quickly as possible.

Turning westwards towards Thibar we came upon the plain of Medjes El Babb. This is the site of the fierce battle for Long Stop Hill and Green Hill.

We now got into the stream of rearward traffic, and were held up for half an hour at a crossroads village. Jerry had blown up the



Third Aux nurses in the Mediterranean Theater. Trainor, Watry, Ryan, Shimp, Gladys Snyder, Ryant, Miller, McDonald, Loring, Van Straten, Nace, Radawiec. Retha Stoker is in this picture but hidden from view.

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bridge. A temporary span permitted one-way traffic, but this was entirely inadequate. It was here that we saw a company of Goums, the hardy native soldiers who have the reputation of being the toughest fighters in the world.

Finally we were through the jam at Beja. We were stopped by two soldiers in Italian uniforms. We deduced from their broken English that they were inquiring the whereabouts of the nearest Italian prisoner of war camp. They wished to assure themselves of a meal and lodging for the night!

From Bizerte to Thibar was a short ride and soon we were shaking the sand from our bedding and removing the layers of dust from our persons. In two days we had seen more of the war than in all the previous three months. It was a post-mortem view but it had opened our eyes. Tunisia will not be the same for many years. God only knows what is in store for Europe."

Captain Adams traveled by truck, a dependable but uncomfortable mode of transportation. Many Third Auxers thought that they could do better and Captain Growdon was one of them. Camped on the outskirts of Mateur, Growdon kept a sharp lookout for extracurricular vehicles. One day, as he was trudging along the road, he saw a racy, underslung phaeton coming towards him. There was a familiar figure at the wheel. This looked exactly like the colonel that he had operated on several weeks earlier. He held up his hand.

"Wait a minute, Colonel. That looks pretty fancy. Any more where this one came from?"

"Sure, lots of them."

"What's the chance of getting one?"

"Excellent. You can take this one here. Just take me back to the dump and I'll get another one for myself."

With that, the Colonel moved over and Growdon jumped in, quite overwhelmed by this unexpected windfall. He took a driving lesson on the way to the dump and spent the rest of the day touring the environs.

The fun lasted just two days. Then an order came out that no American troops were to drive captured German vehicles. Growdon was crestfallen. The next day he found himself in conversation with some British officers.

"I say, this war is getting bloody awful. Do you know how they have done us now? They've put out an order that we can't drive our French civilian cars any more!"

Growdon saw a ray of light.

"Does it say anything about *British* troops riding in *German* cars?" he inquired cautiously.

"No, by Jove. Just French cars. Have you seen any German cars around here?"

"Tell you what," said Growdon. "I'll trade you three of my German phaetons for three of your French sedans. I'll even give you a driving lesson."

The swap was made the same hour. Triumphantly, Growdon returned to his bivouac. His plan was to keep his cars under cover until it was time to return to Constantine.

The scheme worked well for a few days. Then the commanding officer of the hospital spied the private motor pool. He almost had a stroke.

"Get those damn cars out of here, Captain," he thundered. "And quick. You'll have us all in trouble."

"We are leaving tomorrow, sir," was Growdon's reply.

The next day, Growdon called a council of war with his teammates. It would be a

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shame to let these beautiful cars go to waste. Third Aux Headquarters was 250 miles away. It was a long trip for these flimsy vehicles of uncertain antecedents, but it was worth the risk. Growdon, Schneider, and Osteen decided that they would each drive a car to Constantine. To be as inconspicuous as possible they would leave in three separate echelons, an hour apart. Each man had a map and knew exactly which route to take.

Schneider was the first to leave. Osteen followed. Growdon brought up the rear. It was a journey reminiscent of the days when model T's dotted the American landscape. First, Osteen's car had a flat. Because he had no spare, he waited patiently for Growdon to catch up. Growdon had no spare on his car either, but by using all their ingenuity, the two men were able to repair the damage. Osteen then started out again but he had

barely gone a mile when he had another flat. This time, the men wasted no further efforts. They drove the car to the edge of a cliff and let her go. They then continued in Growdon's car, mopping their brows.

At Souk El Arba trouble overtook them again. This time it was the engine. They lifted the hood and looked at every part of the unfamiliar mechanism. No success. When they were well-covered with grease and oil, help arrived in the form of a convoy of GI trucks. Growdon flagged them down:

"Brother, can you spare a mechanic."

"A mechanic? We're all mechanics, Captain!"

It turned out that this was a Signal Corps Company. One of the men took a look at the sedan, connected a loose wire, and behold! there was a sweet purring. Growdon

*El Kantara Pass. In such country as this, Schneider's situation was, to say the least, precarious.*



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and Osteen wiped the grease from their hands and jumped in. They wanted to make up for lost time and they quickly outdistanced the slow-moving convoy.

But not for long. Within an hour the engine began to cough again and finally it died down altogether. Growdon and Osteen did not even bother to lift the hood. They just waited for the Signal Corps Company. The same mechanic strolled over, a big grin on his face. As he finished the job, he turned to Growdon and said:

"You're medics, aren't you? You know, I tried to get in, but they wouldn't have me. They said I wasn't smart enough. Could you get me in?"

"Brother, you are in right now," said Growdon. "We need a man like you."

The sedan fell in at the tail end of the convoy. The sun went down. Growdon tried his lights. They flickered momentarily and gave up the ghost. Travel became hazardous. Suddenly Osteen saw a familiar object.

"There's Schneider's car!" he exclaimed. "But where is Maurice?"

The men got out. Schneider's sedan stood abandoned on the edge of a precipice. It was empty! The circumstances were highly suggestive of foul play. Osteen and Growdon looked at each other in concern. They searched the vicinity. No clues. Schneider had disappeared.

"I am sure one of those damn Arabs shot poor Maurice," said Growdon. "He would have left a message otherwise."

Growdon's fears were close to the truth. Schneider's car had broken down in this spot earlier in the day, far from any human habitation. While Schneider was checking the engine, a fierce-looking Arab had come upon the scene. The man was armed to the teeth and behaved in a very threatening manner. Schneider's situation was to say the least precarious. For a while Schneider kept the man

at bay by pretending that he had a gun in the car but the bluff worked only part way. At the very moment that the Arab made ready to dispose of Schneider, a jeep appeared on the scene and the bandit fled. Schneider squeezed into the back seat of the jeep without ever giving his plushy sedan another thought. For all he knows, it may still be parked in that same dismal spot.

Thus, the three Third Auxers reached home with only one car and even this one never paid off. At Ain M'Lila the same regulations were in force and the sedan had to be relegated to a clandestine parking lot where it gathered dust until Major Harper exchanged it for a radio. The toilsome journey had been in vain and the Third Auxers had learned their lesson. Those foreign jobs might look smooth on the city streets but they just didn't stand up when the going got rough.

Gradually the teams finished their assignments in the field and one by one they filtered back to Headquarters. The first thing Third Auxers learned on their arrival was that their commanding officer had been promoted to full colonel. Actually, this news was four months old. It had trailed behind in a manner that was very typical of all Third Aux mail in those days.

The letter with the good news left Washington the previous December. It arrived in England two months later by slow convoy. From England it was forwarded to North Africa. Because the mail clerks never knew which end of the Third Aux was which, they returned the letter unopened to England. Readdressed once more, it finally caught up with Colonel Blatt in Constantine. The same thing happened to most Third Aux mail. Many men never had a word from home until the Sicilian campaign was well under way!

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There were many parties at Ain M'Lila when the teams returned there. Some people went sightseeing at Timgad and Biskra. Others went frolicking in the Mediterranean at the beautiful resort of Djidjelli. Others went hunting for souvenirs in the native quarter of Constantine. And others stayed home and relaxed. Sometimes those who relaxed had a more exciting time than those who roamed the countryside. On a peaceful afternoon at Ain M'Lila a party of poker players gathered in the shade of a pyramidal tent to indulge their favorite pastime. Stakes were running high and the men had eyes for little except their cards.

At this point the entrance to the tent was darkened by Whitsitt, a lanky, soft-spoken Texan. No one would ever see a demolition expert in him. Yet, he was always dismantling German land mines, hand grenades, and booby traps. Whitsitt could undertake the most dangerous jobs without so much as a tic or a tremor.

"Say fellows, do you know what I found here?" With that, he held a hand grenade in his outstretched hand. Since nobody supplied an answer he continued in the same quiet voice:

"It's a German hand grenade. A live one!"

"Well, take the damn thing out of here," said Schneider. "We're busy."

"It's really perfectly safe as long as you keep your thumb on this nipple. These are much better than our American grenades, you know. With an American grenade you have to let go as soon as you pull the pin. Here, all you have to do is watch your thumb. Of course, if you let your thumb go . . ." And Whitsitt made a significant gesture.

"I said take the damn thing out of here," snapped Growdon.

"Don't you fellows want to see it? You can even throw these things in the air, as

long as you catch it the right way. Look here."

Whitsitt tossed the thing in the air, made a grab for it, and missed. The grenade landed with a dull thud at Schneider's feet.

People who inspected this scene afterwards found seven different holes in the canvas where the men had ripped through. Money was everywhere. One man was running so fast that he tripped over a guy wire and broke his leg. Another was later found in the latrine. In the midst of all this panic, Whitsitt calmly picked up his perfectly harmless grenade and put it in his pocket. He had been successful beyond expectation but it was a long time before his comrades forgave him.

Third Auxers had been keenly aware of their lack of equipment and Colonel Blatt was intent on remedying this situation as quickly as possible. On 24 April he sent Captain Serbst's team, supplemented by five nurses, to the 16th Medical Regiment at Tebessa to undertake the construction of a surgical truck. Serbst enlisted the cooperation of the supply depots in the neighborhood and poured all his energies into the project. He was a regular slave driver. Whenever his teammates would chide him for his relentless enthusiasm, Serbst would say:

"You just wait till we have this thing rolling. We'll get right up to the fighting line and when there isn't any work to do, we'll have our own transportation. Why, in this truck we can go anywhere. They'll all want this when we take it back to Headquarters."

The truck never got to Headquarters. It never got to the fighting line either. In fact, for all Serbst knows, it is still at Tebessa. When it came time to embark for Sicily the men in charge of loading just weren't interested. There was room only for T.O. equipment. This was just a taste of what befell dozens of surgical trucks that were abuild-

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ing in England and the United States at that very time.

While Serbst was thus working himself into a lather, Ralph Coffey and his men were striking out in the opposite direction. This team was camped at Gafsa in the southwest corner of Tunisia, when they learned from a native trader that one could buy the most exquisite burnoose cloth at Tozeur. Tozeur was located in the Sahara Desert on the edge of the Chott Djerid. The men set out immediately.

Between Gafsa and Tozeur lay 80 miles of sun-baked desert, punctuated by an occasional oasis. This country was considered so unimportant strategically that no troops had bothered to disturb it. It was a region traversed only by camel trails, and the Third Auxers depended as much on their compass as on the faint tracks. Engine failure here would have spelled disaster.

At Tozeur the world seemed to have come to an end. The settlement consisted of a handful of miserable hovels inhabited by dirty Arabs and their equally dirty animals.

For the weary travelers there was literally nothing on which to rest the eye, with one exception. This was the *Hotel Transatlantique*. Yes, this forsaken hamlet boasted of a hotel, albeit a somewhat dilapidated one. Third Auxers could hardly believe their eyes, but they were in no mood to ask questions. These natives had evidently never seen an American, let alone spoken English. In fact, the chances for negotiating a purchase of burnoose cloth under these circumstances seemed remote and Ralph Coffey did the next best thing. He suggested an investigation to see if the hotel had a bar and if the bar had ice-cold beer on tap. The day was hot and the men were tired and thirsty. They entered the lounge through a doorway strung with beads.

Evidently, news of their arrival had preceded them. A *maitre d'hotel* was busily dusting off the two available chairs in the establishment. For the occasion he had put on a boiled shirt, black tie, and threadbare tuxedo. The man was a picture of traditional continental hospitality, but instead of ex-

**Between Gafsa and Tozeur lay 80 miles of sun-baked desert.**



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Citizens of Tozeur.

tending a polite greeting he suddenly burst out with:

"Sacré bleu! Mes chers amis, les Américains! Mes sauveurs. C'est formidable." And the voluble little man shot forward to pump Growdon's hand. "Don't you remember me? Martinique! You saved my life at Gafsa."

Then it dawned on the Third Auxers who this was. Several months earlier they had operated on this man who was then fighting with the American troops. He had called himself a member of the French Foreign Legion and had suffered a gunshot wound of the perineum. Evidently, Tozeur was his home and he had returned there when he recovered from his wound.

Martinique spoke a little English and he extended the keys to the city. First he served a delicious dinner of fried chicken and *vin ordinaire* and then he took the Americans

on a conducted tour of Tozeur. Martinique's idea of shopping was to walk into a house, look around for an article that would be of interest to the Americans, take possession of it, and offer it to his friends. When he learned that Growdon was looking for a bracelet, he made a bee line for the most miserable shack in the entire village, walked in, kicked two pigs out of the way, and grabbed an unbelievably dirty Arab woman by the scruff of the neck:

"Here," he said to Growdon, ripping the bracelet from the woman's wrist: "Give her 150 francs."

In the evening Martinique knocked on Growdon's door.

"Mon capitaine, you are invited to pay your respects to Abou El Sib, the lord and master of all Arabs hereabouts. Come with me."

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The Americans were now taken to the home of a veritable African sheik, a bearded and dignified Arab who thought that the Americans had come to claim his territory as their own. In flowery language he explained that he was honored to welcome the conquerors and that he hoped for cordial relations. After this speech he made a magnificent gesture with his scimitar and bade his visitors sit down. The scimitar was quite as much a spectacle as the sheik. It was exquisitely worked and elaborately inlaid and it seemed somehow to embody the essence of Abou El Sib's authority. Once more the Arab held the scimitar aloft and then with a flourish he deliberately cut his own finger! Blood flowed copiously and Growdon grabbed for his first-aid kit but he was stopped by Martinique who explained that an Arab never sheaths his sword until it has drawn blood, either his enemy's or his own.

Thus ended the adventure in Tozeur in a blaze of pomp and circumstance.

Life at Ain M'Lila revolved chiefly around eating and keeping cool. It was now the season of the simoon, a hot, dust-laden wind that blows in from the Sahara. The word simoon comes from an Arabian root meaning to poison. And poisonous it was. No spot was safe. Sand would swirl through the tents, into the eyes, and down the windpipe. It would get into the food, into the trunks, and into everything that was not hermetically sealed. When the simoon was on there was only one thing to do and that was to lie down with a wet handkerchief over the nose and mouth. All other activity was futile.

When it came to running the mess, Captain Hudson was every inch the genial restaurateur. It wasn't always easy. In order to put on something more fancy than C

rations, he had to scour the countryside for the delicacies he wanted: suckling pigs, fat pullets, and fresh eggs. The Arabs had a price for everything. And they were not hard to please. Their favorite payment was a mattress cover from which the women made their wedding dresses.

In his search for food, Hudson had to wander farther and farther. It was on one of these jaunts that he landed in the hamlet of Khenchela on the edge of the Sahara. The people of Khenchela had never seen a jeep. Curiously, they milled about the market place while Hudson tried to explain that he came not to fight but to forage. The conversation proceeded laboriously.

Hudson's method was to point at the article he wanted and ask for the price. The native would answer and Hudson would indicate that the charge was preposterous. This is exactly what the Arab expected. In this case, the procedure became considerably more complicated because neither party could understand the other. Hudson had his eye on a nice fat pig. The owner wanted a thousand francs. Hudson offered five hundred. Negotiations were at a standstill.

"Captain, all you have to do is give him six hundred francs. Not a penny more."

The voice came from the middle of the crowd. Hudson couldn't believe his ears. There wasn't another American about.

"Who was that?" he demanded.

"That was me, Captain." And with those words, a typical Arab pushed his way through the crowd towards the jeep.

"And would you mind telling me where you learned to speak American like that?" asked Hudson when he had recovered from his surprise.

"Oh, that was way back in 1926. I was with the Arab Village at the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial."

"You were at the Sesquicentennial, huh? And what are you doing here now?"

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"Well, I made enough money that one summer in Philadelphia to live here for the rest of my life."

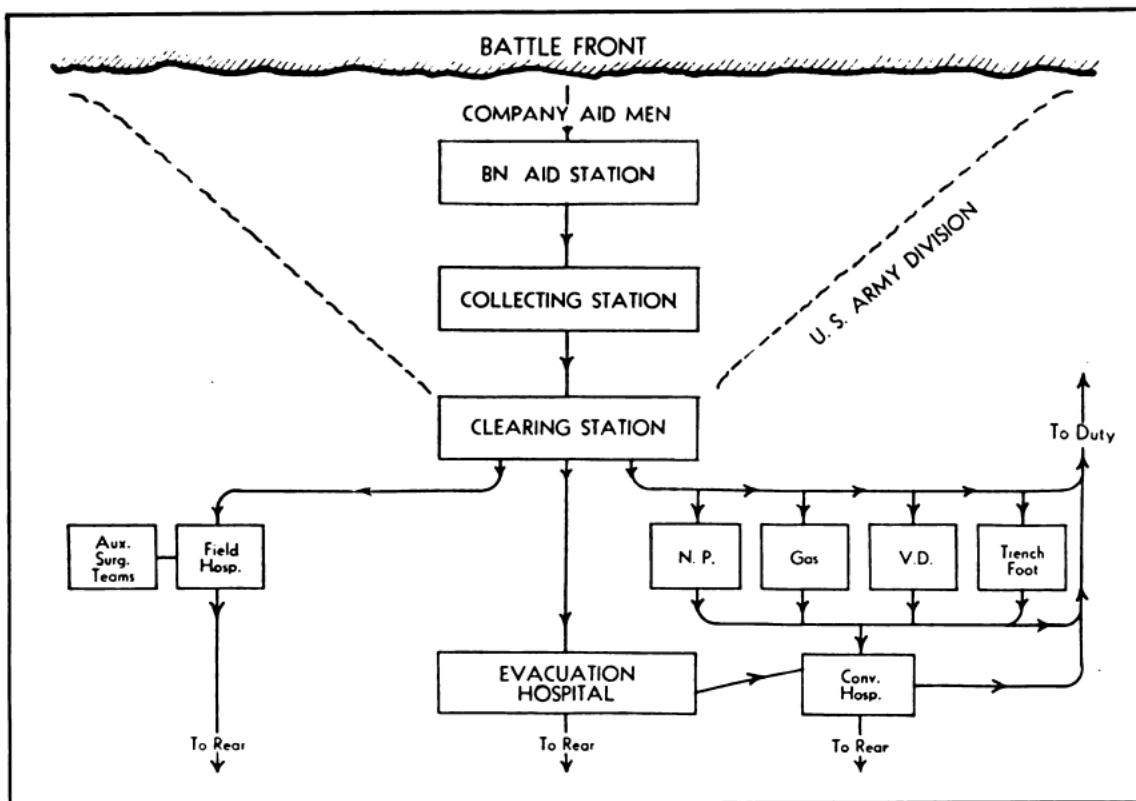
Whenever Hudson told this story later on, he always finished with the remark: "That fellow had me beat. I never could pronounce Sesquicentennial until I heard him say it."

Not all Third Auxers were able to relax however. It was now time to review the experience and draw up plans for the future. Front-line surgery was possible but before it could really be effective, certain drastic

changes had to be made. Let us review the situation as it existed in May 1943.

Evacuation of casualties involves three separate steps:

1. Casualties are taken to the first-aid station, given preliminary treatment, and sent back to a distribution point where they can be assessed. This distribution point is the *clearing station*. Usually each division has one such station. The function of the clearing station is primarily to *sort* the casualties. This is called triage. Sorting is necessary because it is impossible to provide hospital facilities for *all* the casualties so far forward (two to five



Schematic representation of evacuation of casualties in the Army zone.  
By permission of *Surgery, Gynecology, and Obstetrics*.

## N O R T H A F R I C A

miles from the front line). The clearing station itself cannot undertake surgery because it must remain mobile and follow the division. Therefore, casualties are divided into

- (a) serious, nontransportables (6%)
- (b) less serious, transportables (94%)

2. To take care of the non-transportables, there should be a small but completely equipped, forward hospital. Preferably, this hospital should be located very near the clearing station because the non-transportables will not survive a long haul. For lack of a more specific term, this could be called the first-priority hospital.
3. To take care of the transportables there should be a larger, less mobile hospital, located farther to the rear. This hospital will handle all casualties that are not retained at the first-priority hospital. The hospital for the transportables is a second-priority hospital.

In Tunisia, there were clearing stations and there were second-priority hospitals but there was no efficient first-priority hospital. The surgical hospital which had been intended to fulfill this function failed of its purpose for two reasons: it could not keep up with the clearing stations and it could not be broken up into small, independent units. Consequently, the clearing stations frequently functioned without a first-priority hospital. Teams with these clearing stations were forced to undertake first-priority surgery without adequate facilities. To appreciate the difficulties under which these teams labored, one only has to scan the reports that came in at the end of the campaign. They make very interesting reading.

In the main, the teams with experience at the forward installations were those that had been flown to Tebessa on 18 March as well as a special advance detachment of Sec-

ond Aux teams. Let us first see what happened to these Second Aux teams.

The Second Aux teams consisted of two general surgical teams, one orthopedic team, and one shock team. They were alerted early in September by the orders that were first sent to the Third Aux by mistake. The teams sailed for Ireland in October, left the nurses behind, and arrived off Algiers on 8 November. A few of the men were landed on that day but the majority did not disembark until three days later when the fighting had already stopped. No provision for their deployment had been made and consequently they could do very little.

"On the first day we assisted the Naval personnel in their aid stations. The only supplies available were dressings and morphine. We could not evacuate casualties to the ship and had no instructions from the Task Force Surgeon as to the disposition of them on land. We evacuated some twenty-odd patients to the dispensary of the Air Field at Maison Blanche, 15 miles southeast of Algiers, by truck and French ambulances. We were no better off here in the way of equipment but did have a building and we had to do the cooking, feeding, and complete care of the patients. Not having received any instructions, we loaded the casualties into French ambulances and rode with them through the lines to the French Army Hospital in Algiers. After explaining our situation, we were promised that our casualties would be cared for until our own installations could be landed and set up." This, it turned out, was on 12 November, four days later. The situation was muddled but, in view of the many unknown quantities, it could hardly have been otherwise.

These same teams reported for duty at Constantine on 10 January, at a time when the Tunisian campaign was just shaping up. Here "we were working under most difficult conditions. The wind blew sand and dust

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through the tents constantly, the lighting system gave out usually in the middle of the operation, and our trouble with the heating units of the sterilizers and autoclaves was continuous." The greatest handicap of all was the lack of postoperative care in the clearing station.

"There was no trained personnel, no facilities for intravenous fluids, no food for patients except C rations, no facilities for transfusion of whole blood except blood received from military donors, and there was no way of checking this blood for the presence of malaria and syphilis. Patients were evacuated as rapidly as possible, the majority in six to eight hours, some after they had reacted from the anesthesia and some while they were still under anesthesia."

The Third Aux teams which arrived on 18 March had similar experiences. "Evacuation was slow and uncertain. We never knew whether to hold our abdominal cases in the hope that an ambulance would be along soon or to go ahead and operate on them with the knowledge that the station might have to move the next day. A fresh postoperative casualty with a belly wound does not travel well. The medical personnel of the clearing station were uncooperative and thought that we were intruders . . . "

The problem was well stated by Colonel Churchill, Surgical Consultant for the Mediterranean Theater, in his annual report for 1943:

"It is impossible to overestimate the contribution made by members of the auxiliary surgical groups. The history of these organizations will be recorded independently but certain observations from the perspective of the Theater as a whole deserve special comment.

It is one thing to describe the organization of such a Group, its mission in general terms, and quite another to visualize the actual work of a team. At the time of the initial

landing and later during the early phases of the Tunisian campaign, the advance detachments were scattered here and there, living the life of gypsies. There were no precedents that established their mission, no plans that defined the policies of forward surgery, and no adequate facilities for surgery in the combat area. These highly trained surgeons were transferred from one unit to another without explanation or destination of their function, bivouacked in pup-tents throughout months of cold and rainy weather, and begged for transportation to carry out urgent orders. Their surgical skill saved many lives but in addition they nursed and at times prepared food for their patients, cut firewood to keep them warm, rode with them as attendants in ambulances, laundered and re-sterilized surgical linen, improvised surgical equipment, and did their work, exposed to enemy bombing and strafing as well as to the hazards of an inadequately defended and shifting defense line."

Thus, with the Sicilian invasion in the offing, there was much work to be done. With the blessing of Surgeon General Kirk, who had visited Tunisia in March, a plan was worked out by such men as General Blesse, the Theater Surgeon, Colonel Churchill, the Surgical Consultant, Colonel Martin, the Fifth Army Surgeon, Colonel Forsee of the Second Aux, and Colonel Blatt. The task that confronted these men was to create a small, mobile, self-sufficient, first-priority hospital that could be set up alongside the clearing station. They decided to reorganize the so-called field hospital for this purpose.

The field hospital, as it existed in the spring of 1943, was a 200-bed unit staffed by 20 officers, 20 nurses, and 150 enlisted men. To adapt it to the new function of first-priority hospital, it was decided to

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streamline the personnel and equipment into three platoons or hospitalization units. Each unit would have six officers, six nurses, and about 50 enlisted men. It would receive additional equipment and operate a 100-bed installation. Auxiliary surgical teams would do the surgery.

Actually, the concept of a first-priority hospital was not new. Jonathan Letterman was the first man to appreciate the necessity of first- and second-priority hospitals way back in the Civil War. During the first years of this war, the wounded were left at the dressing stations without much treatment of any kind until trains could be provided to carry them to hospitals at the base. For instance, after the first battle of Bull Run in July 1861, an eye witness had this to say:

"There were no ambulances to remove the casualties. The wounded were gradually removed to Manassas in wagons and from there to Richmond by train. The last load left the field on 28 July, just one week after the start of the battle! The wounded were transported in rough wagons, and, on reaching Manassas, were placed in freight cars on the bare floor. They were in these cars from one to two days without food, without water, and without medication. The regimental units gave first aid at the front. The general hospitals received the casualties at the base. In between, everything was haphazard."

Letterman changed all this but in his own words: "It took six months to realize the deficiencies, one year to develop the plans, and two years to put them into effect."

The first field hospital went into operation on 13 December 1862 at Fredericksburg. In the ensuing two years it was developed practically to its present form. Even the need for added surgical personnel during times of stress was realized. This personnel was obtained from the brigade staff. An eye witness has left a vivid description of a field

hospital as he saw it during the battle of Gettysburg in July 1863.

"Most of the operating tables were placed in the open air where the light was best, some of them partially protected against the rain by tarpaulins or blankets stretched on poles. There stood the surgeons, their sleeves rolled up to their elbows, their bare arms as well as their aprons smeared with blood, their knives not seldom between their teeth, while they were helping a patient on or off the table, or their hands otherwise occupied; around them pools of blood and amputated limbs in heaps.

Antiseptic methods were unknown at that time. As a wounded man was lifted upon the table, often shrieking with pain, the surgeons quickly examined the wound and resolved upon cutting off the wounded limb. Some ether was administered and the body put in position in a moment. The surgeon snatched his knife from between his teeth, where it had been while hands were busy, wiped it once or twice across his blood-stained apron, and the cutting began. The operation accomplished, the surgeon would look around with a deep sigh and then—Next!"

In the First World War, field hospitals did not function as first-priority hospitals, at least not on a large scale. Field hospitals were set up at the rear of the division and functioned more or less as glorified clearing stations. There were four for each division: one for gas casualties, one for lightly wounded, one for seriously wounded, and one in reserve. However, the seriously wounded were rarely operated on at the field hospital. They were resuscitated and sent to the rear as soon as they could be transported. It was only towards the end of the war that an attempt was made to staff the field hospital for seriously wounded in such a manner that the surgery could be done there.

The concept of the forward surgical team to staff a first-priority hospital had its birth

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in the French Army. When American medical officers arrived in France in 1917, they found two types of medical units in the French service for the forward care of the seriously wounded. There were the *auto-chir* and the *groupe complémentaire*. The *auto-chir* was the prototype of the first-priority hospital. It had a capacity of 120 beds. The *groupe complémentaire* was the prototype of the mobile surgical unit of the Second World War. It consisted of a mobile operating room, completely staffed and equipped but without facilities for the hospitalization of postoperative patients.

The American medical service organized twelve mobile hospitals for first-priority surgery during the latter months of the war. However, various administrative difficulties arose and these hospitals functioned mainly as auxiliary units with evacuation hospitals, rather than as first-priority hospitals. The official medical history of the First World War does not contain any account of the mobile surgical units in action and that is a pity because their great value in a more mobile type of warfare was appreciated.

There were no auxiliary surgical groups in the First World War. When teams were needed, they were recruited from the hospitals at the base. Teams were organized along the lines laid down by the French. Each team consisted of a surgeon, an assistant surgeon, an anesthetist, two nurses, and two orderlies. These "casual" teams were the forerunners of the auxiliary surgical teams of the Second World War.

From this brief account it can be seen that in the First World War the evacuation hospital was the actual theater of forward

surgery. It was a combination of first-priority and second-priority hospital. There was no separate first-priority hospital.

No wonder then that the manuals had been very vague about forward surgical teams. There was no precedent. Forward surgery in Tunisia had not functioned effectively because the facilities were lacking. In summary then, these were the conclusions:

1. The teams should be used to do first-priority surgery at the field hospitals, as close as possible to the clearing station of the division.
2. Field hospitals should be streamlined to be highly mobile and yet provide adequate postoperative facilities.
3. In field hospital surgery, the need is for general surgeons and chest surgeons. The other surgical specialists such as the neuro-surgeons, the urological surgeons, and the orthopedic surgeons have little place in the field hospital because the work is primarily of an emergency nature. Fully qualified specialists in these fields can work to better advantage in the evacuation hospitals.
4. Auxiliary surgical group headquarters should be placed close to the front so that the commanding officer can visit the teams regularly. There should be sufficient transportation to take care of emergency needs and the group should be self-sufficient in tentage and housekeeping equipment.

These conclusions had been established at the price of blood, sweat, and tears. It was not long before they could be put to the test.



## Chapter V



### Sicily

For two weeks after the Tunisian campaign the Third Aux rested on its laurels. Then word was flashed: Get ready for another invasion. The entire available strength of the Group was to be committed. In addition the Second Aux would furnish seven teams.

Colonel Blatt now drew up the following team roster:

#### GENERAL SURGICAL TEAMS

TEAM No. 1: Major Howard W. Brettell, Capt Duncan A. Cameron, 1st Lt John A. Esposito, T-4 Lawrence E. LeMieux, T-5 Lloyd L. Kraus, T-5 Matt A. Rautiola.

TEAM No. 2: Major Reginald S. Rilling, Capt Ronald W. Adams, Capt Roy A. Geider, T-5 Jay W. Barker, T-5 James R. Netherland, T-5 Asa Thomas.

TEAM No. 3: Major John B. Peyton, 1st Lt Michael M. Donovan, Capt Myles T. Kavanaugh, T-4 Wesley E. Robinson, T-5 John L. Myers, T-5 John M. Seely.

TEAM No. 4: Major Charles H. Avent, 1st Lt John P. Sheldon, Capt Gordon A. Dodds, T-4 Svend W. Anderson, T-4 Thomas A. Owens, T-5 Edward G. Gibson.

TEAM No. 5. Capt Harvey M. Williams, Capt Robert A. McTamaney, Capt Kenneth J. Chadwell, T-4 Stuart J. Garcia, T-4 Stanley E. Gustus, T-5 Emil K. Natale.

TEAM No. 6: Capt Allen M. Boyden, Capt Thomas J. Floyd, Jr., Lt John M. Serena, T-4 Chester S. Houston, T-5 Charles A. Bonin, T-5 Bert H. Karjala.

TEAM No. 7: Capt Benjamin R. Reiter, Capt Albert W. Brown, Capt Irving R. Hayman, T-4 James F. McDonald, T-4 Marion G. Mitcham, T-5 Clarence F. Merkord.

TEAM No. 8: Major John C. McClintock, Capt Edwin M. Soderstrom, 1st Lt Herschel F. Connally, Jr., T-4 Troy Mitchell, T-5 Arthur O. Scoggins, T-5 Claude W. Thomas.

TEAM No. 9: Major Watkins A. Broyles, Capt Philip F. Partington, Capt Rocco A. Tella, T-4 John S. Page, T-5 Clifford C. Inman, T-5 Daniel S. Overly.

TEAM No. 10: Major Francis M. Findlay, Capt Marion E. Black, 1st Lt Wentworth L. Osteen, T-4 Allen E. Ray, T-5 Harold J. Meinz, T-5 John S. Chobanian.

TEAM No. 11: Major Ralph R. Coffey, Capt John A. Growdon, 1st Lt Maurice Schneider, T-4 Clarence C. Moody, T-4 Lloyd Cooper, T-5 Claris W. Dixon.

TEAM No. 12: Major Giacento C. Morrone, Capt William R. Ferraro, Capt Eugene F. Galvin, T-5 Roy P. Montz, T-5 James E. Battles.

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### ORTHOPEDIC SURGICAL TEAMS

TEAM No. 1: Major Rafe N. Hatt, 1st Lt Nathan C. Plimpton, Jr., Capt Max H. Parrott, T-5 James A. Bowman, T-5 James C. Fish, T-5 Walter I. Nelson.

TEAM No. 2: Major Harry C. Blair, Capt Robert M. Coffey, Capt Lester W. Netz, T-5 John M. Curran, T-4 Clarence C. Whitman, T-5 William F. Thomas.

TEAM No. 3: Major Edward D. Hagerty, Capt William F. Maley, Capt Martin R. Mesick, T-4 Vincent P. Stich, T-5 Alexander P. Milbert, T-5 Emery W. Hopkins.

### THORACIC SURGICAL TEAM

TEAM No. 1: Major Mark H. Williams, Capt Horace G. Williams, Major Lawrence A. Block, T-4 Edward H. Fitzpatrick, T-5 Jan Prys, T-5 Simon Wenzveg.

### NEUROSURGICAL TEAM

TEAM No. 1: Major Walter G. Haynes, Major Charles A. Serbst, 2nd Lt Emma I. Doty, 2nd Lt Maribel E. Dorton, T-4 William L. Harris, T-4 Cecil J. Patterson.

### SHOCK TEAMS

TEAM No. 1: Capt Mark J. Wallfield, T-4 Samuel A. Rosenberg, T-5 Charles W. Castro.

TEAM No. 2: Capt William C. Gaynor, T-4 Victor Nigro, T-5 Howard J. Kennedy.

TEAM No. 3: Capt James J. Whitsitt, S Sgt Nelson D. Roberts, T-4 Robert J. Smith.

In drawing up their plans, Colonel Blatt and Colonel Forsee had to reckon with the possibility that field hospitals might not arrive early enough to handle first-priority casualties from the very beginning. Therefore they decided to attach the teams not only to the field hospitals but also to the division clearing stations which would be

landed within the first six hours. In addition there was to be a special clearing station (the so-called beach clearing station) which would come in with the 1st Engineers Special Brigade, a body of troops that were to prepare the beach for the movement of heavy equipment. Third Aux teams would work at this station as long as necessary. A few teams were attached to evacuation hospitals.

As soon as Third Auxers learned that they would have to do a certain amount of work at the clearing stations they knew that they were going to have trouble because clearing stations do not have the equipment for first-priority surgery. How to remedy this? Some help could be expected from the Navy. Shore parties would evacuate casualties across the beach and to the ships off-shore. But there would be more delay than seriously wounded men can tolerate. Third Auxers tackled this problem with grim determination.

It was a man-sized job. First, they had to ingratiate themselves with the clearing station officers who resented outside interference. Next, they had to get the cooperation of the supply officers. Next, they had to scour the warehouses. Next, they had to improvise what was unavailable. And finally they had to get this equipment on the loading lists. Serbst's beautiful surgical truck was ditched for lack of room but most of the smaller items were eventually secured and packed. Third Auxers emerged battered but unbowed.

D Day was set for 10 July. Captain Adams speaks:

"There is an apt expression which, though not confined to Army life, was forcefully brought home to us in those three wearisome weeks before D Day. I refer to the phrase 'sweating it out.'

## S I C I L Y

Our sweating was literal as well as figurative because the hot sun of North Africa beat down on us from morning till night without mercy. The dark canvas of the tent crowded the heat in on us and intensified the relentless temperatures beyond endurance. From noon to sunset we simply melted away. During those hours the temperature in sun or shade soared to 115 degrees and the Kham Seen or desert wind converted our camp into a furnace. To venture outside meant hot, stinging blasts of air which left the face burned and raw and the throat sore and seared as from the inhalation of a flame. I recall being cool on only one occasion. That was when I stripped and lay on a canvas cot, covered only with a Turkish towel while a tent mate threw a bucket of water over me. I was comfortable for ten minutes.

But 'sweating it out' connotes much more than a physical state. It is a mental state, an emotional experience which has about it the implacable relentlessness of *Kismet*. We were all waiting for invasion day but we did not know how or when or where it would come and we were unable to influence our destiny by a single thought or word or deed. The mental tension was reflected in endless hours of discussion, speculation, argumentation over every controversial subject as well as a few non-controversial ones. There was no work which would help pass the time and occupy the mind. All we could do was sit and wait. Our camp was on an instant alert and our movements were circumscribed. Once or twice we were permitted the luxury of a swim. For the rest, our days were consumed in eating, sleeping, laundering, and arguing.

One other diversion deserves comment: the occasional air raid to which Bizerte was subjected. These raids were almost a welcome interlude, for what soldier will not tell you that times of action are infinitely more bearable than times of inaction. Bombs

come down, yes. But what of it? They either have your name or they don't. The bombardier has no personal malice towards you. The gunner does not know you from Adam. Each man tries to destroy you with all his cunning but in the end it is fate that decides. No use getting panicky.

At these times the night was illuminated by white or green flares and searchlights probed the darkness in long fingers. Once these searchlights pinned down a machine, tracer bullets reached up into the sky in leisurely chains of garnet and ack-ack shells made pretty little smoke puffs. Sometimes the converging streams of fire found their target and then the helpless victim nosed to earth in a writhing trail of smoke and flame. At other times the attacker escaped. I well remember one low-flying bomber that was caught in the beam of half a dozen searchlights and tried desperately to fight its way out. We, who were watching, vehemently cheered for our boys to shoot it down, but the guns kept silent and the Nazi winged away. The next day we found out that the crews were ordered not to shoot because the plane was over a large bivouac area and the danger from our own shells was far greater than that from German bombs. Even so, it was common to hear the whine and thud of those jagged pieces of steel as they kicked the ground close by.

Two other events are worth recording. One was the disappointment that we were unable to go on the copy-book invasion, which consisted of practice loading, sailing, and disembarkation exercises, lasting three or four days. The night before the scheduled trial the boat we were to use was damaged in a collision with another vessel. So, to our dismay, we were left behind.

The other event was the 4th of July gathering of the officers of the 3rd Division, Reinforced, at General Truscott's Headquarters. Here several hundred of us met in the dust and torrid heat of an olive grove,

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to hear of the job ahead, with an exhortation to give it the old college try. It was a version of the "night before" football rally.

Such was the pattern of the 'sweating out' process. It was ended one day before sundown, as we climbed into a truck which took us to a vacant field. There we were unceremoniously dumped to snatch what sleep we could. Up again at four o'clock and with coffee under our belts, we walked the two miles to the docks with approximately 80 pounds of equipment. By noon, we were on board and stood out to anchor in the Bay of Bizerte, the collecting point for our portion of the armada.

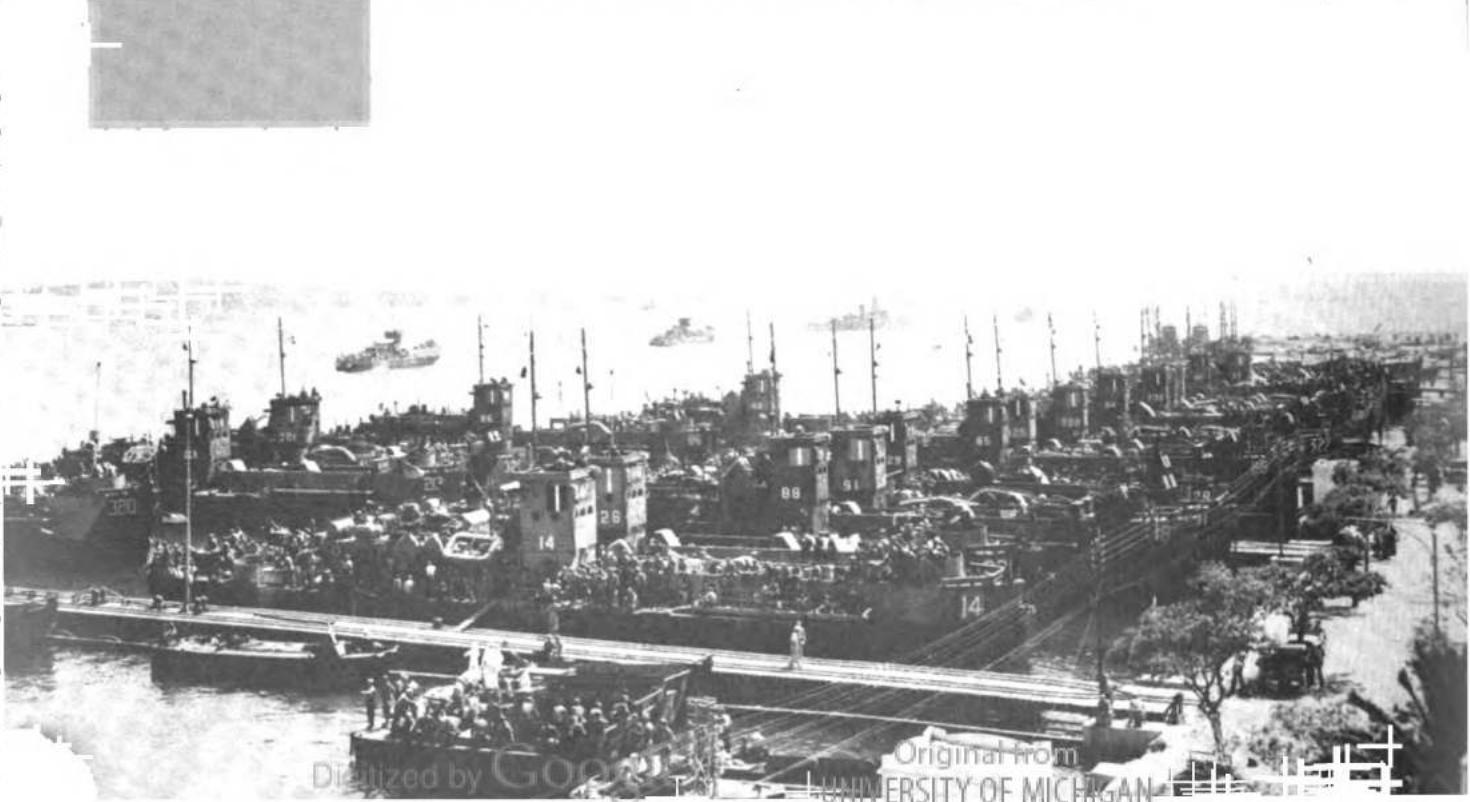
We found ourselves on LST 358, a Landing Ship Tank with two enormous doors in the bow through which large vehicles can get on and off. She was loaded with vehicles of all kinds including two batteries of the large 155 mm howitzers. Eight guns in all. On the top deck were four huge stacks of ammunition, a load which had the captain in a dither because one bomb or shell could blow the boat to hell without any need of looking for the pieces. There were three

experienced Navy men on board: the captain, the first mate, and the boatswain's mate. The latter had been wounded in the ankle during one of the night raids. He should have been in the hospital but he was too good a man to leave behind and he got around surprisingly well. The rest of the crew was green.

All afternoon and evening the anchorage was collecting boats so that the sun set on a veritable armada. Dawn found us stretched out in long columns on a calm sea. There was no sign of enemy action but overhead flashed squadrons of planes and abaft churned numerous destroyers. This first day was a pleasure cruise. We stuffed ourselves with the iced drinks that we had not tasted for months and remarked that Navy chow certainly had it over Army chow. Too bad that the food did not stay with us very long.

On the second day a stiff north wind started blowing. It whipped the waves and tossed our shallow-draft boats hither and yon. Soon I was lying on my stomach, giving my all to a bucket or the vicinity thereof. I lay there half stupefied, wondering if the

All afternoon the anchorage was collecting boats of every description.



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invasion was going to be postponed. Was it a sign from heaven or just bad luck that the worst sea in months should wait for this moment?

At ten o'clock in the evening the boatswain's mate hobbled into the cabin roundly cursing his luck because one of the large crates of high explosives had been broken by the tossing of the boat. It was his job to get it shored up before it blew us all sky high. A formidable task in the blackout but one which he accomplished with eminent success.

Towards midnight the seas became calmer and we could hear the sound of guns in the distance. We supposed that we were in the lee of land and that the invasion had started. An hour later, being unable to sleep and feeling improved, I dressed to go on deck. In front of us gun fire hit the shore with a roar of noise and flame. Behind us was a deeper-throated growl as cruisers, with their heavier armament, lobbed missiles at some enemy target. The shore reply was feeble and grew feebler by the minute. It was difficult to believe that this pyrotechnical

display was hurling death and destruction at the shore. It was so reminiscent of fireworks at home.

Dawn lighted the sky and the enemy air force made its appearance. The planes were flying high, too high to be seen, but they announced their presence by tremendous water spouts. The guns of the fleet replied in kind and the sky filled with expanding balls of smoke. I still thought it was pretty.

The light of day showed a hilly shoreline about three miles off. Mine sweepers, infantry barges, and small craft were shuttling around. Destroyers weaved in and out, occasionally firing a salvo at some strong point on shore. Behind us were cruisers, ready to throw up an anti-aircraft screen or toss a screaming broadside at the land. Our own LST had a large pontoon strapped to her side. This pontoon was to precede all heavy equipment so that it could act as a causeway. Two sections, each a hundred feet in length, were strapped together. They went overboard with a splash. Then, just as the Navy crew got ready to guide her into shore, the chain that controlled the bow

Our first steps on Sicilian land. Beach scene between Gela and Scoglitti.



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door snapped and there we were. In the long swells, repairs were difficult. Everybody ran around in circles. Since our LST was supposed to be the first to land, it was not long before an escort vessel pulled up. A hoarse voice through a megaphone shouted: 'Get on that goddam beach, you stinkers!' 'We can't,' answered our captain and then there followed a long conversation the details of which made no sense to me. We just wallowed in the combers and I overheard Boyden and Floyd discuss endometrial biopsies. I don't know what got them started on that subject.

Finally the repairs were made and we nosed in. The pontoon bridgeway was adjusted and we picked up our equipment. We stayed on the pontoon as long as we could and then we stepped off into the water and waded in. It was our first step on European land.

We walked across a field of tomatoes until we came to the coast road and then turned

left towards Licata. We passed a large concrete pillbox with a disabled gun. A 1st Division soldier told us that two Italians had come out to be taken prisoners a few hours earlier. When the Americans came forward, other Italians inside the pillbox opened fire and there were many casualties. One of the Americans then sneaked around the back with a bangalore. That settled the argument.

Pushing along the roadway in a straggling double file, we came upon a house from which three highly excited Italians shouted: 'Soldato est morte! Parola d'honneur!' We surmised that there was a dead soldier inside but we had no desire to bury him. The dead would have to wait for the living.

After proceeding two miles down the roadway we climbed up on the bank and sat down. The beach was a hundred yards in front. Around and about an Army rolled by. Behind us rose the rugged hills. All seemed fair and quiet. We were in a natural

We watched a bomb strike on LCT.



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amphitheater with a grand view of the armada in the bay. Unloading went on uninterrupted all morning. This was a cinch. We had the enemy by the tail. I had gotten thus far when pandemonium broke loose. There was a roar of motors, guns popped away, and everybody ducked. It was too late to run for shelter, even if there had been shelter. I folded my knees, pulled in my neck, and waited for the worst. A Messerschmitt zoomed by and strafed the roadway. It was all over more quickly than it takes to tell but I don't mind saying that I was badly scared. I unwound myself and took stock. I had been sitting on some boxes of howitzer ammunition! I rapidly removed myself and started digging a good foxhole.

That afternoon we watched the scene before us. Sometimes our own planes would be flying in formation overhead. Sometimes one or two German planes would sneak in to strafe the roadway or drop bombs on the boats. To do this, they would dive down, release the bombs about two hundred feet above the target, and scuttle away. We watched with our hearts in our mouths but, although many bombs dropped, not a single one hit its mark. Anti-aircraft batteries came up. The sound of a plane was the signal for wild firing from a dozen spots. Nerves were taut and fingers itchy. Nobody was much concerned about what he was shooting at. Flak fell everywhere. We soon learned to watch from the comparative safety of a foxhole.

Our hospital had not yet set up so we stayed with the clearing station. There had been few casualties and most of us rolled up in the ditch to get what sleep we could. I must confess that I made a good job of it for I was dog tired. My sleep was disturbed by only two raids.

The following morning we were permitted to breakfast in peace but soon afterwards Jerry came over again and scored his only accurate hit. A bomb struck one of

the LST's which were unloading a mile down the beach. The boat was enveloped in a tall pillar of black smoke. Glittering sparklers hissed and sputtered heavenward. I wondered how our boatswain's mate made out.

Ken Chadwell and I took an ambulance down to the burning boat to help the medical battalion set up a first-aid station on the beach. We soon had a dozen badly injured men laid out on litters and started giving them plasma. The Jerries were trying hard to pick off the other LST's. The first time or two we jumped. But we could not accomplish anything that way. We ignored everything but the wounded.

In about two hours the injured had all been treated or at least gotten into transportable shape. We moved them to our clearing station. There, other members of our unit had already relieved the tired surgeons who had been operating throughout the night, and we fell to.

As early evening approached, trucks took us to our own hospital a couple of miles inland. Just as we arrived we were ordered to tear the tents down and move to a new site because the engineers were making a landing strip out of the field and the quartermaster troops were stacking ammunition. We trekked off by moonlight.

For the next three days we worked nip and tuck to stay ahead of the casualties. Enemy interference died down after the second day but bombers kept on coming over at night. Three incidents stand out in my memory. The first involved a plane that came in from the ocean, crippled by our own fire. The pilot became entangled in the tail and went down with his ship. Somewhat later, another of our planes was shot down before our eyes but this time the pilot was able to free himself. He landed about a quarter of a mile away. Our enlisted men ran out, thinking that they were going to capture a German. Instead, they brought

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back a grinning American who was cussing our gunners for all he was worth. A third picture is vivid because here again American planes were victims of American guns. Two planes soared over the hills. One was hit. The pilot jumped. Machine gunners on the ground opened up on him. He would have been a dead duck, but for his pal in the other plane. This fellow circled his machine around the falling figure and he kept on circling until the anti-aircraft crews got it through their heads that they were shooting at an American. Both pilots escaped injury.

The first Third Auxer to set foot on Sicily was Captain Ferraro. Ferraro is a native Sicilian whose home town is Santa Croce Camerino. When he learned that his birthplace was directly in the path of the invasion he arranged to go ashore with the first wave and at dawn on D Day he found himself on the beach at Marina de Ragusa. The first rays of the sun lighted up the scene. Ferraro rubbed his eyes. Every dune, every gully, every track was familiar to him. Was he really returning as a conqueror to this country he knew so well?

Tanks came ashore and Ferraro asked for a lift. A driver motioned him to climb on the turret. The tank rumbled on, picking up the trail towards Santa Croce. Ferraro is a small man who at this time was completely hidden behind a three-day beard, an oversized helmet, and heavy goggles. His own wife wouldn't have recognized him. But Sicilian eyes are sharp. At a bend in the road the tank came upon a donkey cart. The driver of the cart took one long look at Ferraro, let out a yell, and ran forward, shouting at the top of his voice, "Madre di Iddio! Guglielmo Ferraro! My cousin!" The next moment they were in each other's arms. It was a strange reunion.

When the first excitement had subsided, the donkey cart driver spoke up:

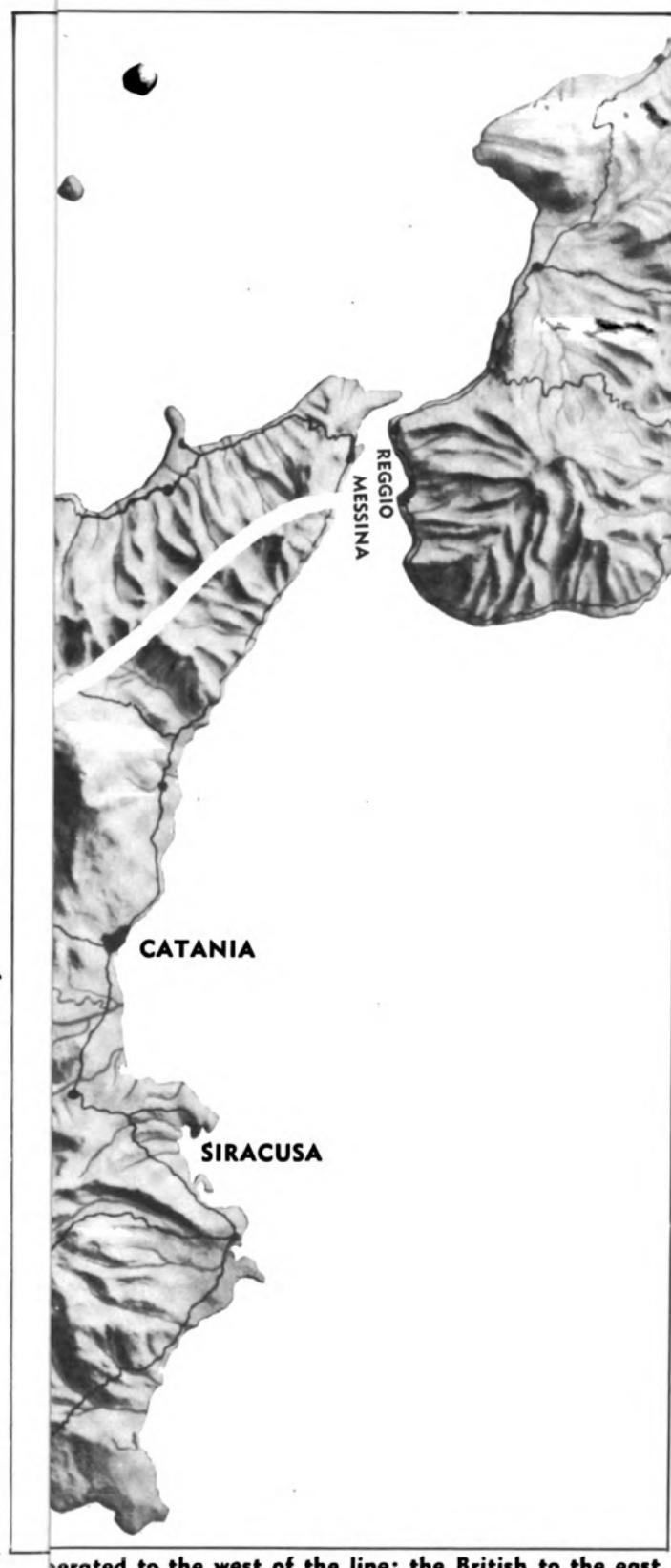
"Come at once to Santa Croce. Your grandfather is there. Everybody is there. We are expecting you."

Ferraro motioned for the tank to lead the way. It was only a short walk. On the edge of the village an old man was waiting. He used one hand as a sun visor and kept his eyes fixed on the road. Behind him were a handful of other Sicilians of assorted sizes. This was the Ferraro clan. Again there was an outburst: "Guglielmo! Doesn't he look wonderful! Our own Guglielmo!"

The small group now continued towards the market place. At every corner, excited Santa Croceans ran out. Everyone knew Ferraro personally. Welcoming ceremonies were repeated so often that it took an hour to go the few blocks to the market place. Between acknowledging the enthusiasm and accepting the toasts, Ferraro had a very busy time indeed and when he finally arrived in front of the city hall he was surrounded by a huge crowd of milling, shouting, gesticulating Sicilians who fairly pushed each other out of the way to get a look at *Il Capitano Americano*.

Shortly the mayor of the town appeared on the steps. He was dressed in his official regalia and started to make a speech but he had hardly gotten under way when American tanks thundered by and drowned him out completely. Wine cellars were opened and toasts flew thick and fast. The town band struck up the American anthem, followed by Santa Lucia. People started to dance. It was a celebration such as had not been seen in Santa Croce for centuries.

In the midst of all this, American bombers came over and they opened their bays over Santa Croce in utter disregard for the historic occasion. The bombs missed their mark and the villagers immediately decided that they had been spared because of Fer-



Occupied to the west of the line; the British to the east.



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raro's intervention. People came from all over to pay homage. Ferraro was king for a day. Too soon he had to relinquish his throne. His team was at nearby Scoglitti and he was needed there. He left with his grandfather's good wishes ringing in his ears. The people of Santa Croce are still talking about "their own Guglielmo."

Meanwhile the invasion was taking place according to plan. In the American sector three infantry divisions (preceded by the 82nd Airborne and reinforced with the 2nd Armored) landed on the south coast, while the British Eighth Army attacked a similar sector on the east coast. The defending garrison consisted of ten Italian divisions and two German divisions. The Italians were deployed along the coast and had little stomach for fighting. The German divisions, which were armored, were distributed along the central axis and bore the brunt of the defense. They staged the only serious counterattack on the beach. This was at Gela on D plus 1. Third Auxers had a ringside seat.

Captain Boyden had just moved his team inland to join his clearing station. The men had come to rest on the first row of dunes from where they had a commanding view of the beach. From this distance the straggling lines looked very much like the snake dancers that Boyden remembered well from his school days and he was just about to say something about it when, for no apparent reason, the lines broke and the men scattered. The sight of these tiny figures scrambling wildly in all directions struck Boyden as ludicrous.

"Look," he said to his teammates. "Something funny is going on there."

He had hardly finished speaking when a terrific blast shook the earth and showered him with an avalanche of sand. Then he realized what was going on. Shells! The

next few minutes, Boyden's men were the busiest they had ever been in their lives. They dug their holes fast and deep and they did it without benefit of instruction in hasty entrenchments.

Boyden now looked inland. Two tanks appeared on the brow of the second line of dunes. They were about 500 yards away. Captain Boyden had an inspiration.

"Look! There are our tanks. Let's wave them down this way. Maybe they can find out where the shelling is coming from."

"You stay right in your foxhole, son," came a voice farther down the line. "Those are Tigers. They'll blast your head off if you wave them down."

It was true. German tanks penetrated to within a mile of the beach at this point, while Italian infantry attacked from the flanks. For a full five minutes the tanks stood motionless. They seemed to survey the scene and then retreated without firing another shot. It was the only moment when the beachhead was seriously threatened.

With the dissipation of this counterattack, the troops were free to throw their full force in a northwesterly direction. Leaving the eastern part of the island to the British, the Americans captured Agrigento on 16 July. On the same day another spearhead advanced on Enna where a junction with the Canadians was effected on 20 July. This marked the collapse of resistance in western Sicily. An armored column thrust across the island and captured Palermo on 22 July, just twelve days after D Day.

On 28 July, American troops took Nicosia and opened the road toward Troina. At this town a violent five-day struggle took place. While the British and Canadians pushed between Mt. Etna and the sea, the Americans reduced one enemy position after another at Troina. The Germans clung doggedly to their defenses but the constant pounding finally became too much for them and on

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6 August they gave way. This signalled the collapse of the Etna line.

Now began the final phase. Quickly American and British forces converged on Randazzo, the last point at which the Nazis could make a stand. They held out just long enough for the bulk of their forces to escape to the mainland. Randazzo fell on 13 August. Messina fell four days later. The Sicilian campaign was over.

Third Auxers remember Sicily as an island of barren hills, dusty groves, steaming tents, ravenous mosquitos, and malaria! Captain Adams has given the Third Auxer's view.

"From Licata we moved to Agrigento, beautiful old town whose crowning glory is the two Greek temples built upon a sand-

stone ridge. I shall always remember that silhouette but we moved on to Corlione before I had a chance to examine these gems. We next went into bivouac a few miles outside of Palermo. Here was respite from work with a chance to view the capital city of Sicily. It is a fine town with many modern buildings, nestled in a crook of land and surrounded by hills. The structures have suffered sadly, the main part of town being a rubble of masonry with few signs of former grandeur. One whole day I drove around in a horse-drawn carriage seeing the sights: seaside suburban Mondello, the catacombs of the Cappucini Fathers, the famed medical school, the badly destroyed harbor, the closed Chinese Palace which was mysteriously opened for the price of a dollar, and the really interesting historical museum. This too opened up at the waving of a green-back.



Key men in the detachment. Standing: Penterman (Adjutant), Lamont (Supply), Mullison (Supply), James (Motor Pool), Nelson (First Sergeant), Montgomery (Mess). Squatting: Camery (Headquarters), Kinsella.

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We were soon to return to work, this time in a desolate spot where our tents were showered with silt from trucks pausing at a water point. The location was far from ideal but the patients swarmed in, so that each man was operating for 18 to 20 hours at a stretch. Under such circumstances the surroundings scarcely penetrate the realm of consciousness. Here too our stay was limited to only a few days. We pushed on to Aquadolce.

We set up our hospital on a level field overlooking the ocean. The tip of the Cape of Orlando curved out into the sea ten miles beyond. This area was hotly contested and we had a front-seat view because our own artillery was set up in the town of St. Agata three miles back. For two days we watched the artillery duel. In the air, Jerry was completely outclassed. But he still had something to give.

The fighting moved on and we were soon on the move again, pitching the hospital tents in a dry river bed at Brolo. Here we took in few patients. We had no room for more, hemmed in as we were by the steep hillsides.

We now moved to Barcellona, our most eastern location. Just as we moved in, a Mitchell bomber came in low, one engine belching smoke. Men began to drop from it in quick succession. One, two, three, four. The parachutes dropped lazily to earth. But what about the pilot? Halfway down, he hurtled away from the smoking fuselage, his parachute catching in the breeze. We breathed a sigh of relief.

Messina fell on 16 August. The next day Reg Rilling and I went to see it. We caught a ride in a jeep driven by a chap who was taking pictures for O.W.I. Our road led across the mountainous tip of Sicily, whence one has a grand view of the city. There was plenty of evidence of recent fighting here: burned-out guns and tanks, smashed vehicles, piles of small arms, grenades and am-

munition, a countryside scorched to a brown crisp.

We were feeling well pleased as we left the mountains behind to follow the twisting roadway down to Messina. But our reverie was rudely interrupted. Just as we pulled up in front of a parked car, there was a loud roar. Smoke and debris billowed in the air. We threw ourselves into a ditch, on top of the occupants of the other vehicle. They told us that the Germans were shelling this strip of road from the Italian mainland. Within twenty seconds of the first burst, a second went off, and when the smoke had cleared, a nearby house showed nothing but broken walls. We brushed the dust and dirt off our clothing, deciding to run for it, and jumped in our jeep. At a spur in the road we saw the bursts of interdictory fire. We waited and then retraced the roadway to the top of the hill. Here we sought shelter in some fortifications and bumped into an Italian who had lived in Brooklyn and could speak English. He told us that the Germans had pulled out their gun two nights ago but had left a large searchlight behind. He pointed out the spreading panorama of Messina and could even tell us where the Germans had their guns on the Italian mainland. We asked if there wasn't a back road into town. He showed us one and we hightailed down it.

The city was a shambles, worse than Bizerente. Rubble was everywhere. We drove a mile without seeing a human being. Burned out vehicles littered the streets. All the buildings were a mass of twisted girders and piled masonry. One vindictive soldier, finding a large picture of Mussolini, had taken the trouble to pin the picture to a tree, drill a few rifle shots through it, and thrust a bayonet through the cheek!

But the desolation began to pall on us. The human mind can react so far and no further. Thus it was in a mood of introspection that we finished our sight-seeing.

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At one point on the winding road back, forty or fifty Italians came pouring out of a dugout in the mountainside to surround our jeep, smiling, laughing, shouting, and gesticulating. On a doorway, someone had written in chalk, "Welcome to the English and the Americans. We thank you for giving us back our liberty, but why did you take so long?" Yes, I thought, it *has* seemed like a long time, but there is still a long road ahead before we can go home."

During most of the Sicilian campaign Third Aux Headquarters remained in the Constantine area. It was not until 13 August that Colonel Blatt was finally able to move his little group to Bizerte. Here he got a clearer picture of what had gone on and he drew a number of conclusions. The most important one had to do with the proper locale of first-priority surgery.

The teams in Sicily had not worked exclusively at field hospitals. They had been distributed fairly equally over the three types of installations that work in the for-

ward area, namely clearing stations, field hospitals, and evacuation hospitals. At the clearing stations, teams were handicapped by lack of equipment and lack of postoperative care for the casualties. At the evacuation hospitals, teams were largely superfluous because the regular staff is adequate. But at the field hospitals, teams had really come into their own. In Sicily, the field hospitals did not always function as first-priority hospitals but when they did, the teams had done their most important and outstanding work. The field hospital was the natural *locus* of the auxiliary surgical team.

The other lessons of the Sicilian campaign were these:

1. When the teams are attached to clearing stations for an invasion, these clearing stations should have extra equipment. In Sicily this was not available.
2. Patients at a field hospital need large quantities of blood. Therefore, a blood transfusion service is an absolute necessity.
3. To make certain that the field hospital does not bog down, the clearing sta-



Striking camp at Bizerte. Note the size of the bedding rolls.

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tion should have experienced triage officers.

4. The old rule that an auxiliary surgical group headquarters should be stationed in the communications zone was *passé*. Teams cannot be expected to fence for themselves. The commanding officer should be close to his teams to supervise their deployment.
5. In Sicily each team consisted of three officers and three men. Third Auxers found that they could do better work with a reinforced team of four officers and four men. They also felt that the nurses should be allowed to work with the teams.

Gradually the teams came together in the Palermo area. On 16 October they boarded a Liberty ship and set sail for Bizerte. It was a rough voyage in more ways than one. Third Auxers closed their eyes to their discomforts and concentrated on the pleasure of the reunion with Headquarters. At Bizerte they were dumped into lighters, ferried to shore, and herded into a staging area that was even worse than the one at Palermo. Now came the blow: They were not sup-

posed to be in Bizerte at all! "Get back to Palermo" read orders that awaited them. Without a chance to catch their breath, the men turned about-face, boarded the hospital ship Seminole, and headed back to the same place they came from. The ways of the Transportation Corps are inscrutable.

The close of the Sicilian campaign marked a milestone in Allied strategy. At the TRIDENT Conference in May of 1943 the Allies realized that a conquest of Italy would eventually grind to a halt at the Alps. The cross-Channel operation had been postponed but it could not be put off entirely. Therefore, as soon as the troops had gained a foothold in Italy, General Eisenhower was directed to send back to England a certain number of seasoned units around which a gigantic invasion force was to be built. The Third Aux was one of these units.

Sometime during the summer the Group had dropped an enlisted man and a request for a replacement went to Bizerte. Fletchinger was picked for the job.

Fletchinger had arrived in North Africa in December 1942 as a "casual," that is a man without an assignment. Casuals are step-



Merle Harper and Mildred Radawiec go sightseeing in Palermo.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

children. They have no home, travel by cattle car, and float from one dreary replacement depot to another until they are assigned.

So it was with Fletchinger. Bouncing through the various depots in North Africa, he finally arrived in Bizerte and received his orders to join the Third Aux. He could have kissed the paper. His next job was to find out where the Third Aux was. Sicily! He waited out his turn for a boat. Casuals do not have a high priority and when Fletchinger finally arrived in Sicily, the Third Aux had already left for England.

The adjutant in the Palermo replacement depot was stumped. The Third Aux? Nobody knew where it was. But what about the Second Aux? That unit had just gone to Italy. It must be that the orders were really for the Second Aux. Before Fletchinger could raise a voice in protest, he was on his way to Naples.

At the Naples Depot the adjutant looked at Fletchinger's orders and blew his top. This was ridiculous. Fletchinger had no more business in Italy than he had at the North Pole! Out with him! With the first available transportation (six weeks later) Fletchinger went back to Bizerte.

At Bizerte the Third Aux was only a dim memory but after much correspondence the fact was established that the Group was now

snugly ensconced at Stourport, England. The orders were amended: "Proceed at once to United Kingdom." On paper it looked easy. In reality it meant another grim journey by cattle car across North Africa. Bizerte, Constantine, Algiers, Oran. Each city was a dismal memory of the year before. Bedraggled and dispirited, Fletchinger boarded his ship. He fully expected to be told that the Third Aux had meanwhile gone back to the States. To his great relief these fears proved unfounded and on 27 April, just one year after his orders had reached him he reported for duty. During this year he had traveled ten thousand miles, stayed in eight replacement depots, belonged to sixteen different drill squads, and accounted for twenty-four letters of inquiry. Whenever things got rough after that, Fletchinger would shut everybody up by saying: "Aw nuts! You never had it so good. You should see the Repple Depple in Naples."

The Third Aux embarked for England in two detachments, one on the Monterey and the other on the Sluiterdyk. The two ships left Palermo on 11 November and docked separately on 26 November, one in Liverpool and the other in the Firth of Clyde. From here the travelers converged on Lichfield Barracks where they found temporary quarters.

Let us now see what the men in England had been doing.

On 11 November Third Auxers said good-by to Palermo.



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## Chapter VI



Cowley Barracks on 5 February 1943 seemed to be the end of the world to Major Graves and the men who stayed behind with him. The constant rain spread gloom and dejection. Oxford was no place to fight a war. The bottom had dropped out of the Third Aux. The men were mired in the mud, literally and figuratively.

But the human mind has a wonderful resilience. Small improvements occurred. First, the Group moved to Slade Camp, next door to Cowley Barracks. A slade is a flat piece of bogland. Flat and boggy it was. But there were compensations. There was plenty of room. There were plenty of stoves. And there was plenty of coal. Such elementary comforts were hailed as the beginning of a new era.

Next, the weather took a turn for the better. After six weeks of steady rain, the clouds parted and the sun came through. Spring was still a long way off but the first stirrings were in the air.

Then too, Third Auxers began to look at Oxford with different eyes. If they were going to live here for a while, why not take advantage of the educational opportunities, the cultural activities, the scholastic atmosphere? A club got under way. Oxford professors extended invitations. There was a dance. Gradually Third Auxers thawed out and Blanche Stewart presently announced her engagement to Cyril McQueen, a bright

young man in the Criminal Investigation Department. She became a June bride.

Major Graves appointed a new executive staff:

Executive Officer	Captain Gates
Adjutant	Captain Rodda
Supply Officer	Captain Hoffman
Detachment Commander	Captain Maloney
Mess Officer	Captain Leo
Finance Officer	Captain Sutton
Chief Nurse	Lieutenant Moline
First Sergeant	Sergeant Humes

These men picked up the pieces and put the unit on its feet again. Great changes were on the way. North Africa had become an independent theater and the Group in Oran became in effect a separate unit. The Group at Slade Camp was to be looked on as the nucleus of a new auxiliary surgical group. Requisitions for filler personnel were to be submitted. Cheltenham sent word "to spend the time in training."

To train a surgical technician at Slade Camp called for a lot of ingenuity since the only equipment at hand was yards and yards of gas-proof curtains! Nothing daunted, Captain Maloney had his clerks type out an elaborate training schedule. On paper it looked wonderful. It listed everything from operating room technique to application of plaster casts. Of course, it was never followed but that was immaterial. The inspectors were impressed.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

There were other difficulties. All the experienced office personnel had been siphoned off to North Africa. The few typists that remained were wholly unprepared to cope with the mounting task of making out reports, answering correspondence, filing circulars, referring surveys, and classifying printed matter. Things were always at odds. Did the wood-and-kindling report go in by the week or by the month? Did the swill report go to the Commanding Officer of the Base Section or to the Commanding General of the Theater? Was the subversive activities report confidential, restricted, secret, or top secret? Did the latest directive on toilet paper specify the amount that should be used? These were the questions that plagued Captain Rodda until Cheltenham agreed to supply a medical administrative officer. The Third Aux drew a prize. After Lieutenant Sensenbach reported for duty there was never any more trouble.

In spite of these handicaps the Third Aux scored two significant victories almost from the start.

The first one occurred when Slade Camp had to be turned back to the British. Under ordinary circumstances the supply officer is supposed to check all property against the existing inventory and if there are any shortages he hears about it. But in wartime it's different. Slade Camp had been occupied by several American units and each time a change took place, the supply officer merely signed the camp over with the notation that military exigencies prevented a proper inventory. The British had appraised Slade Camp, the Americans had a piece of paper, and everybody was happy until it was time to turn the camp back. Then came the revolution.

The Slade Camp inventory was a document of over fifty pages, listing thousands

Third Aux officers at Slade Camp. Top row: Sapienza, Dworkin, Snider, Zeiders, Privitera, Kempner, Friedman, Bang. Second row: Gartner, Hersch, DeFabio, Dahill, Hurwitz, Jones, King, Adolph, Beaudreault, Fisher, Stoller, Campbell, Lavieri. Third row: Dashe, Hillman, Herteau, Kondor, Foregger, Wolfe, Herman Brown, Humphrey, Leo, Sutton, Hoffman, Spritzer, Bernstein, Twarog. Front row: Tansley, Maloney, Gates, Eldridge, Wood, Church, Graves, Macomber, Kane, Spencer, Rodda, and Coffin.



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## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

of articles. To count them all would take a week. Most supply officers would have taken the easy way out. But not Captain Hoffman. He was thinking of the American taxpayer and he pressed every available Third Auxer into service. Officers, nurses, and men swarmed over the buildings, counting, checking, and rechecking. The results were most interesting. Nobody was much surprised at minor discrepancies but how had fifty gymnasium mats disappeared? And three hundred pallets? And six hundred blankets? When this matter was called to the attention of the British, "somebody" suddenly remembered that these articles had been signed out by British units while the Americans were technically accountable. This little discovery immediately balanced the books and Captain Hoffman quipped: "Lend-lease is a wonderful invention. We lend them a new battleship and they lease us a run-down camp."

In the spring of 1943 the Wagner-Murray-Dingle bill for socialized medicine was just beginning to raise its head. Medical officers wanted none of it but they had no way of expressing their disapproval because in the service nobody is supposed to write to his Congressman. At the direction of Major Graves, Lieutenant Sensenbach prepared a letter requesting permission for Third Auxers to waive this age-old rule. The letter became a *cause célèbre*. It was forwarded through channels and collected ten intermediate signatures before landing on the desk of the Secretary of War. Three months later it came back with a final endorsement that the request was granted. This was a major concession that was later given wide publicity. Third Auxers chuckled.

Life in England in 1943 was on the austerity pattern. Food, lodging, and public

transportation were at a premium. Third Auxers missed especially the quick lunch counter of the American drug store. In London they could always fall back on the Red Cross clubs but in the country they had to cope with British rations which leaned heavily on coarse bread, watery vegetables, and boiled potatoes. Especially potatoes. England was potato-conscious. Every billboard had its giant poster depicting a kippered herring and boiled potato with the words THIS FOOD WILL WIN THE WAR. It remained for Captain Lavieri to provide the catch line: "Sure, but how are we going to get the enemy to eat it?"

And even such plain food as kippered herring and boiled potatoes was not always available. Dining rooms were open only at certain specified hours and it was not always possible to time one's arrival accordingly. Major Graves almost came to grief that way. On tour in a remote area of Wales, he had a streak of bad luck and showed up at the restaurants either too early or too late. "Sorry, sir," the waiter would say. "We have just stopped serving. Can I get you a cheese sandwich?" Being a man of hearty appetite,



The new executive staff. Left to right: Sutton, Maloney, Graves, Gates, Hoffman, Sensenbach. Picture taken at Sudbury.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS



Dormitory at Slade Camp. In the background, Humphrey.

Graves took the cheese sandwich. Often he would eat several cheese sandwiches and this diet repeated itself three times a day for four days in a row. Finally, the twenty-fifth sandwich got stuck sideways and Graves came back to camp with a full-blown case of intestinal obstruction. Whenever he left to go on a trip after that, his roommates always inquired solicitously: "When you get back, shall we have the salts ready or would you prefer an enema?"

Thus the weeks in Oxford quickly grew to a month and then to two months. In the daytime there were the sight-seeing trips, the bicycle rides, the track meets, and the boat races. At night there were the theater parties, the study groups, the pub crawls, and the dances. It was an era of good fellowship that later came to be known as the honeymoon.

At about this time an anonymous Oxford girl with poetic proclivities poured her heart out in the following plaintive lines:

### INVASION

or

### THE ENGLISH GIRL'S LAMENT

Dear old England's not the same;  
We dreaded invasion and it came.  
But no, it's not the beastly Hun;  
The goddam Yankee Army's come.

We see them in the trains, the bus;  
There isn't room for both of us.  
We walk to let them have our seats,  
Then get run over by their jeeps.

They moan about our lukewarm beer;  
Think it's like water over here.  
But after drinking two or more  
They spend the evening on the floor.

And you should see them try to dance;  
They get a partner, start to prance.  
When you're half dead they stop and smile  
And say: "How's that, my honey chile?"

We see them try to jitterbug;  
They turn and twist and pull and hug.  
It's enough to make red Indians jealous,  
Yet Yanks are civilized, so they tell us.



England was potato-conscious.

## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

Yankee officers cause us smiles  
With their colored pants you can see for  
miles.  
We wonder if they are mice or men;  
Decide they're wolves and shun their den.

With admiration we often stare  
At all the ribbons they do wear,  
And think of deeds so bold and daring  
That win the ribbons they are wearing.

Alas, they haven't fought the Hun,  
Nor glorious battles have they won.  
That little brown ribbon, it just denotes  
They crossed the Atlantic in big boats.

We speak to them, they just look hazy,  
They think we're nuts, we think they're  
crazy.  
Yet, they *are* Allies, we must be nice;  
They love us like the cat loves mice.

They laugh at us for drinking tea,  
Yet a funnier sight you'd never see  
Than a gum-chewing Yank with a dull  
looking face;  
He'd raise a laugh most any place.

They say they can shoot, yes, and fight.  
It's true, they fight when they are tight.  
I must admit their shooting's fine;  
They sure can shoot a damn-fast line.

Third Aux nurses at Slade Camp. Top row: Webster, Wright, Frances Davis, Boesling. Second row: Siron, Nathalie Davis, Green, Marsic, Caldwell, Roe, Hubbard. Third row: Baker, Marcelle Johnson, Armbruster, Brewer, Sorber, Janet Snyder, Henderson, Vogel. Bottom row: Stewart, Leveille, Dietrich, Bixby, Moline (chief), Hibbard, Bestman, Root, and Powers.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

They tell you that you've teeth like pearls;  
They love your hair the way it curls;  
Your eyes would dim the brightest star;  
You're competition for Miss Lamarr.

You are their life, their love, their all  
And for no other they'd ever fall.  
They'll love you, dear, till death do part  
And if you leave them, you'll break  
their heart.

And then they leave you broken-hearted;  
The camp has moved and love departed.  
You wait for mail that does not come,  
Then realize you're awfully dumb.

In a different town, in a different place,  
To a different girl, to a different face:  
"I love you, darling. Please be mine."  
It's the same old Yank and the same old  
line.

Whereupon an equally poetic Third Aux-  
er delivered himself of the following re-  
buttal:

### A YANK'S ANSWER to THE ENGLISH GIRL'S LAMENT

Dear old England's not the same;  
It's better since the Yankees came.  
No longer do they fear the Hun  
Because the U. S. Army's come.

We ride their ancient trains for miles  
But always stand up in the aisles.  
And while we stand mid baggage-heaps  
The limeys ride in Lend-Lease jeeps.

Of course we do not like their beer  
But what else have they over here.  
You try to get a second stout,  
They always say "We've just run out."

And when a Yank goes to a dance  
The poor guy doesn't have a chance.  
Some girl who springs up from her chair  
Will clutch him like a polar bear.

I've yet to see a girl so smug  
She hasn't learned our jitterbug.  
They try to imitate our style  
While we just struggle on and smile.

Each song they play, they must admit  
Is always some new Yankee hit.  
And while they tell us of our wrongs  
Their bands keep murdering our songs.

With our light pants we're wolves they say  
But still the girls don't stay away.  
You'll see a most unusual sight,  
These English lambs chase wolves by  
night!

This girl says we haven't even fought  
the Hun,  
But just suppose we had not come;  
I'm sure that she would feel quite silly  
With frauleins walking Piccadilly.

Our long-range bombers battered France,  
Gave Jerry hell at every chance.  
In fact we have him so afraid  
The R. A. F. made a daylight raid!

They laugh at us for chewing gum,  
But still, they say: "Have you got some,  
chum?"

Today we hardly ever chew;  
We give it all away to you.

They tell us we get too much pay  
And that we toss our dough away.  
It's a damn good thing our pay is high  
'Cause we pay double for what we buy.

A quart of Scotch is a treasure today;  
We still don't think it's worth the pay.  
To the English, it's 25 shillings, we've  
found  
But to the Yanks, they'll charge five  
pounds.

We tell the girls they've teeth like pearls;  
We love their hair the way it curls;  
For all these charms we'd go through fires;  
I'll admit we Yanks are damn good liars.





## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

When we leave, these girls are broken-hearted;  
They're sad and lonely 'cause we've parted.  
But the very next night, at a dance, they discover  
Another Yank to replace their lover.

To a different Yank with a different face,  
In the same old town, in the same old place,  
The same sweet girl will call you "honey"  
And love you as long as you spend your money.

To the sweet young girl who wrote that poem  
For her Yank Allies so far from home,  
We propose a toast with our up-raised drinks  
But not to her poetry because her poetry stinks.

May she soon see the day when each Yank will depart  
And return to the girl who is still in his heart.  
To American girls there's none other so fine,  
They are much too darn'd clever to fall for a line.

I know many folks will be happy once more  
When the last dreadful Yank departs from this shore.  
A few peaceful years, then the sabers will rattle:  
Once again, we'll be welcomed to come fight your battle.

Towards the middle of March the British sent word that they wished to reoccupy Slade Camp and Major Graves started on a hunt for new quarters. His most promising lead was at Cookham on the Thames, a holiday resort not far from Lady Astor's Cliveden. The Thames is dear to every English-

man. Not only did the buildings face the river but there was a whole fleet of pleasure boats, waiting to take the tenants joy-riding. Graves and Gates were fascinated. It so happened that they started their inspection in the glass-enclosed rotunda atop the main tower and Graves already had visions of himself, megaphone in hand, directing the movements of a floating Third Aux on the river down below. Alas! The dream came to naught. The plumbing facilities of this princely estate would never have stood up under a Yank invasion.

The only other available site was at out-of-the-way Sudbury in Derbyshire. Here, on the fringe of the Black Country the 28th Station Hospital had already established a home in a sprawling assortment of Nissen huts. Graves took one quick look and hurried back with the news: "The honeymoon is over. We move on 26 March."

Saying goodbye to Oxford entailed a good many tearful scenes. It was hard to "uncement" those pleasant relationships. There even was a pseudo-tragedy. This involved the commanding officer of the district, a hard-bitten old-timer who had made things miserable for the Third Aux on his first inspections. From long experience, Colonel Rouse knew exactly where to look for trouble: in the mess. He pounced on every dirty pot, every dusty stove, every stray bit of garbage. Then Captain Leo had a brilliant idea. He appointed his brightest sergeant as KP pusher and held out handsome rewards. The results were startling. Immediately the pots and pans were neatly lined up, the stoves freshly painted, the garbage smartly disposed of. The old man was immensely pleased. After that, he used to drop in more and more often for a cup of coffee or an extra supply of the cigars he loved so well. On the day of departure he made a fatherly speech and received a spontaneous ovation. The strain was too much. The next day he had a heart attack that almost killed him.

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The move to Sudbury was made by train. The Transportation Corps provided three special coaches and five box cars. The Third Aux was entitled to only three box cars but sixty bicycles filled two extra cars. On M Day, all the cars were hooked onto the Oxford-Birmingham local and the Third Aux was off.

Contrary to all security rules, the trip was made in broad daylight and at five o'clock in the afternoon the Third Aux Special pulled into Sudbury, unmolested by friend or enemy. Trucks from the nearby Depot G-18 drove up and took the Group to its new home. On the map, it looked interesting enough: DEERPARK, ORNAMENTAL GROUNDS. These words were slightly deceiving however. Sudbury had neither deer nor ornaments but only rolling farmlands with the ancestral home of Lord Vernon at one end and the Nissen huts at the other.

The Nissen hut was a product of the Second World War and in 1943 fairly dominated the English landscape. Depending on one's viewpoint, it was either an architectural triumph, an outsized igloo, or a twen-

tieth century cromlech. The ones at Sudbury were about average: the floors were always shedding dust, the walls were always dripping moisture, the windows were always too loose or too tight, and the light was always too poor for reading and too bright for sleeping. Later on, Norman Jaffray delivered the following diatribe on the Nissen hut:<sup>\*</sup>

### WHO WERE THE YANKS?

London, 1 April 2316

By special correspondent

An astonishing archaeological find by a party of diggers in Derbyshire has opened up a whole new field of historical speculation. It is well known, of course, that Britain long ago was once occupied by some people called "Romans." Not until now, however, had anyone guessed that a second invasion from overseas took place during the twentieth century by an armed horde known as "the Yanks."

\* Reprinted from the Saturday Evening Post with permission from the author.



Group at Slade Camp. Visitor, Graves, Stewart, Leo, Colonel Rouse, Leveille, Rodda, Maloney.

## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

Who were these Yanks? All we have at present to go by is a roughly semicircular group of hutments, very primitive in nature which were apparently used to house the invaders' cattle. The date of the occupation is set for us by scrawled inscriptions on the buildings. Though rude, they are still decipherable. One reads: "Christmas 1945. Three years in this damn (illegible) and me with 109 points." Some of the inscriptions are even ruder.

It seems reasonable to suppose then that during the Neo-Atomic Age an army of semicivilized invaders conquered Britain and stayed there for a period of years, leaving these mute records of their occupation. Many of the implements they brought with them have been disinterred from the clayey soil—crude kitchen utensils to which an

odor of prehistoric beans still clings, flints for making fire, and a few curiously shaped glass vessels labeled "Lighter Fluid," whose contents have an unpleasant acrid taste when swallowed.

Did the Yanks settle down in the new country, intermarry with the inhabitants, and raise families? "Brother, you ain't just akidding," to borrow an archaic expression carved in one of their runnes.

The Yanks left behind them no extensive baths, aqueducts, or roads, as did the Romans. We can only conclude that they disdained the use of water, and that the rusted four-wheeled vehicles in which they rode were capable of negotiating cross-country terrain without benefit of highways.

They came, they conquered, they departed. How they reached Britain is, at present,



Nissen hut interior.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

unknown to us. Perhaps there was once a land bridge connecting their continent with ours. At any rate, there has been no second visit from this mysterious horde of savages whose pitiful relics have so recently been unearthed in Derbyshire.

When Third Auxers looked around a little more closely, they found that their billets were scattered over an area measuring easily a square mile. Clusters of huts were separated by waving grain fields and interconnected by cement walks. This was where the bicycles came into their own. Traffic was brisk especially during meal hours. With the lower half of their figures hidden from sight, the silently gliding cyclists seemed to float through space in a cotillion that would have fascinated the most exacting ballet master.

The Rolling Third Aux was the new nickname for the Group.

Life at Sudbury quickly fell into a pattern. Reveille at eight, followed by a bicycle sprint for the mess hall. At nine, calisthenics or a road march. At ten, a lecture on anything from protein metabolism to the anatomy of the bicycle. At eleven, a *Kaffee Klatsch*. At twelve, lunch. At one, language classes. Then a siesta. At four, volley ball and at five, cocktails. Then supper and, in the evening, a quiet bicycle ride to Ashbourne or Uttoxeter. England was on double summer time which meant that dusk would come at ten and darkness at midnight. These were long evenings when the frogs in their pools and the hounds in their kennels supplied the music. It was the rustic life.

Urban delights were few. The nearest town was Derby which offered little more than an ancient hotel, a few drab stores, and



Sudbury Camp from the air. Hospital buildings in the center, enlisted men's quarters to the right, nurses' quarters to the left, officers' quarters in the background.

## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

a rundown theater. Birmingham was larger but no better. Moreover, a trip to these places involved travel in the "recon." This vehicle, whose full name was command reconnaissance car, ½-ton, winch-equipped (some said wench-equipped) was about as well suited to the English roads as an elephant to a skating rink. With its massive tires, its high center of gravity, and its top-heavy chassis, it would pick up every little bump, magnify it a hundredfold, and pass it along to the unhappy occupants without benefit of springs. After several hours, the violent agitations would set up a sympathetic vibration in the human protoplasm, much as dust particles dance in the air. GI drivers delighted in whipping this dreadnaught around the corners without the slightest regard for the local citizenry so that even the ordinarily well-poised Colonel Cutler once exclaimed: "For God's sake, driver, slow down. You'll scare the hell out of these poor Englishmen!" Somehow the recon advertised the American way of living as no other article, with the possible exception of chewing gum.

Late in April there occurred an event that was of great interest to Third Auxers. Colonel Diveley, the Orthopedic Consultant, came back from an inspection trip to Tunisia with several rolls of film, a head full of ideas, and a contagious enthusiasm. One of his observations was that surgical teams at the front need mobile operating rooms of their own. Here, his words fell on fertile soil because Colonel Cutler had already been working on the same idea. A mobile surgical unit was under construction at the 5th General Hospital. This unit was now turned over to the Third Aux for further experimentation.

Now there also began to be some work for the teams. On the whole, the few hospitals that were operating in England in the spring of 1943 were not particularly busy but this gradually changed with the build-up of the

Eighth Air Force. Daylight raids were costly. To care for the casualties, the 12th Evacuation Hospital set up in two stations in East Anglia. Third Aux teams helped staff these stations. It was the first opportunity to work on real casualties.

An additional opportunity opened up in Cornwall. Here, American bombers sometimes made emergency landings and there were no facilities to take care of them. Colonel Cutler provided the solution. A wing of the civilian hospital in Truro was set aside and Third Auxers took over. It was a choice assignment. Later, another team was dispatched to nearby Newquay with the same mission.

To send a team on detached service in those days involved a great deal of paper work. The procedure was the same, whether it concerned a team or a division. First, Colonel Cutler notified Third Aux Headquarters that a team was needed at a certain hospital. Next he would request the Operations Division to issue the orders. Operations then called the Third Aux for the names and serial numbers of the team personnel and sent the information to Base Section Headquarters. Base Section would verify the names and numbers, issue the orders, notify the Transportation Officer, and alert the Third Aux. All this took two weeks! The actual orders would usually arrive by teletype in the dead of night. This was only one example of the sort of thing that vexed Third Aux Headquarters throughout the summer.

Another one had to do with promotions. Here, the orders which split the Third Aux were the stumbling block. Originally, the unit in England was the parent body and the unit in North Africa the detachment. On arrival in North Africa, the detachment found itself in an independent theater and quickly assumed the status of an independent unit. The question was now: Where was

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the parent body? In England or in North Africa?

The victims were the team leaders, mature surgeons who were entitled to the rank of major. Many of them had been taken into the Army as captains with the promise that they would receive their promotions within six months. In the summer of 1943 the six months had lengthened to a year and each time Major Graves submitted the recommendations he ran into the same answer: no promotions as long as the Third Aux was a two-headed hybrid. The issue was bandied back and forth for months until Graves bypassed channels and buttonholed the Deputy Theater Surgeon at Cheltenham. Then the promotions went through and ten team leaders were elevated in a mass ceremony.

It was this sort of frustration that made the commanding officer of another auxiliary surgical group sigh: "This unit is a hot potato. Its problems, created but unsolved by higher echelons, are largely left to fate. Since field manuals and other War Department publications offer only vague generalizations about the functioning of an auxiliary surgical group, subordinate headquarters do not understand and will not make appropriate decisions. Each time a major decision is to be made, it requires elaborate explanations which the stereotyped individual cannot understand. To accomplish common-sense results, the devious route must be followed. The devious route, unorthodox and appalling to the rigid mind, often results in mighty cataclysms of disapprobation."



Three frustrated Third Auxers: Humphrey, Campbell, Crandall.

## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

When there is no precedent, realism goes by the board. For an auxiliary surgical group there is no precedent in man or nature. It is strictly an illegitimate orphan, dependent on charity, deprived of privilege, cursed by many, praised by few, understood by none."

At Sudbury Third Auxers meanwhile excelled at volley ball, bicycling, and pub crawling. Of the three, bicycling was the most popular, although it did present its complications as the following story illustrates.

On a beautiful Saturday morning two Third Auxers decided to visit Dovedale, a picturesque gorge on the edge of the Peak district. Dovedale was about twenty miles away and our two adventurers were not sure that they could cycle that far. They put their bicycles on the train at Sudbury, intending to get off at Ashbourne, cycle to Dovedale, stay overnight at the Izaak Walton Hotel, and return to camp on Sunday. It looked foolproof.

Everything was fine until the train pulled into Ashbourne. Then the two would-be cyclists discovered that the conductor had forgotten to put their bicycles on. Since the next train would not arrive till late that evening, the only thing to do was to stay overnight in Ashbourne and pick up the bicycles the next morning. Ashbourne had only one small inn and, of course, that was full. The innkeeper told them to try Mrs. Jones down the street. Mrs. Jones lived a mile away. She was full too but she had a cousin that ran a boarding-house in the country. "Strite ahead. You cahn't miss it." The hikers did miss it and when they finally found it they were so tired, they went straight to bed.

Next day, bright and early, the travelers retraced their steps to the station in the hope that their bicycles had been delivered. They

had! But now another obstacle appeared. The over-conscientious baggage master had locked the bicycles up and gone home for the day! How to find him? Once more, the Third Auxers struck out. Their quest led from one farmhouse to another and lasted the better part of the day. When they finally recovered the elusive key, they had lost all enthusiasm for exploring Dovedale. Hungry, footsore, and dejected, they limped back to Sudbury. There was a lost weekend.

After Dovedale, the greatest tourist attraction for Third Auxers was Scotland. Major Graves chose to see it from the saddle of a bicycle. Let him speak for himself.



Captain Simons does the honors in the ablution hut.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

"I had just acquired a geared lightweight and I was anxious to put it to the test. Some weeks before, I had asked a Scottish friend what to see in Scotland and he had answered: 'Start with the Lowlands and finish with the Highlands. But take a cape along. It will be wet.' I never had better advice.

My first stopping point was the Lowther Hills, the finest heather tract in the world. When I arrived there, the sun was already setting. Each hillside caught the rays at a different angle and assumed a hue of its own. The play of colors was fantastic. I was captivated.

The next morning I was warned that 'there was a bit of a fog aboot.' This turned out to be a gross understatement. The fog was a downright rain against which even my Scottish cape was no protection. Into the teeth of it I headed. Through Gourock, across the Firth of Clyde, and up to Loch Lomond. The farther I got, the harder it rained. At Luss I knew that I had had it. Torrents of water came down the hills. Ben Lomond was completely hidden from sight. White caps dotted the water. Trees sagged under the onslaught of the elements. I thought that I had come to the end of the world. But wait, what was that? Praise the Lord. An inn!

The Calquhoun Arms is one of the most attractive small hotels in Scotland and on this particular day it bulged with a crowd that had come to celebrate the selection of Luss as the most picturesque village in all Scotland. For my part, it could have been voted the most forsaken village in Scotland but that was immaterial. The Calquhoun Arms was for me. In no time I changed my clothes, drank my tea, and joined the party. For two days we toasted Luss, sang songs, listened to speeches, and looked out over the rain-swept hills. It was an experience that I would not have missed for anything.

Finally the storm blew itself out. I said goodbye to the Calquhoun Arms and con-

tinued in a northerly direction. My path led across lonely moors, desolate uplands, and barren hills. Then it descended to the waters of Loch Leven at Ballachulish. It not only descended, it disappeared! According to the map, the same road continued on the opposite shore but as far as I could see there was no ferry to take me there. I yelled. I yodeled. I whistled. The only result was that in the distance a dog began to bark. From the chimney of a farmhouse on the far shore, smoke lazied up to the sky. That meant food! And I was hungry. What to do?

I might be standing there yet if I had not had the good sense to go on a search. Somewhere hidden in a tree I came upon a wooden box with a large bell. WHANG!!! I whacked it hard enough to wake the ghosts of all the clans. At length a leisurely figure sauntered out of the house. He launched a small rowing boat and started bucking the strong current. Halfway across, he started bailing out frantically with an old can and when he eventually reached me, his boat was half-swamped. I was worried but the old man assured me that all would be well on the return trip because there was only one bicycle. He braced my wheel in the front end and we set out. Our little boat bobbed violently up and down. Once or twice I thought that we were all going to wind up on the bottom of the loch but the ferryman knew his business. For the magnificent sum of half a shilling (about a dime) I was transported across the treacherous waters and I suffered nothing worse than a pair of wet feet in the process. That night I arrived in Fort William.

From here my trail led along the Caledonian Canal to Inverness and then south again through the Grampians. Here I had another narrow escape. I had been battling a head wind all day and arrived late at night in the little town of Dawlinney. The only hotel in town was filled. I looked at my map. The next village was thirty miles away,

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across a steep mountain range. I'd never make it. At this very moment a hospitable Scot came along and invited me into his home. Never did I appreciate a meal and a bed more than that night.

I was now on the home stretch. The country suddenly became less interesting and, like the horse that smells the stable, I instinctively increased my pace. Everything went well till noon. Then the strain began to tell and I developed a bad case of what cyclists call road weariness. In this unhappy condition, the wheels feel dead, the saddle gets lumpy, the chain seems loose, the muscles ache, the legs are heavy, the wind blows ill, the clouds spell rain, and the rider is overcome by the pain of monotony as much as by the monotony of pain. Small wonder then that I found myself overtaken by a Scottish lass who waved her hand at me in a gesture of superiority. That was enough. I dismounted to catch my breath and massage the unwilling legs. It began to rain. I wished that I had never seen my bicycle.

Somewhat improved, I shifted into bottom gear and started up the long hill. Then came a swift descent and who should be standing there but the same girl who had passed me an hour before! She had put her cycle against the verge and was looking disconsolately at a broken chain. My first thought was: 'Serves her right!' Then I reflected on how I would feel in her position and I suddenly remembered that I had put an extra chain link in my bag when I started. I swung around and offered my services. Had I not been bald and bashful, I think that she would have kissed me. The damage was easy to repair and within a few minutes she was off in a splatter of mud. I never saw her again.

The pay-off came later. Towards evening when there were still many painful miles between me and my destination I came to a hill. I mustered my last bit of energy, bore

down on the pedals, and bang! There went my own chain! A lonely road. A thick fog. An early dusk. A weary traveler. What price chivalry?"

When they wanted to write home about such experiences Third Auxers had the censor to reckon with. Some took him seriously, some did not. After the Group arrived in Sudbury a prankster wrote home as follows:

"After leaving where we used to be and not knowing that we were coming here, we could not tell whether we would arrive or not. We did and now we are here. The weather here is just as it usually is in this season but not at all like it was in the place where we used to be. We brought everything with us plus a lot of things that we acquired in the place where we lived before we came here. The whole thing is quite a new experience because it is not at all like where we were before."



General Paul Hawley, Chief Surgeon  
of the ETO.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

It is now time to stop this letter before I give away too much information to the enemy."

As the summer wore on, it became apparent to everybody that the strategic emphasis was shifting back to England. In August Allied leaders selected Normandy as the point of attack and May 1944 as the target date. The problem now was to amass the necessary implements. It was done with prodigal hand. On D-Day the Americans had not only 1.5 million troops in England but also 20 million square feet of warehouse space, 44 million square feet of open storage space, 55,000 vehicles, 20,000 railroad cars, and 1,000 locomotives. They had 94,000 hospital beds and enough reserves for 30,000 more. Such preparations could not go on very long without making themselves felt.

But where did the Third Aux come in? That was a question that baffled even the men at Cheltenham. Plans were changed no less than a dozen times. It would be wearisome to recount all the false starts in their repetitious detail, but a quick summary is of interest.

On 19 March Major Graves in a letter to SOS Headquarters pointed out the anomalous position of the Group in England and the difficulty of acquiring supplies without a table of allowances. At this time the Third Aux had absolutely nothing except a few sets of surgical instruments. The answer was to prepare requisitions based on a hypothetical table. Captain Hoffman wore himself out composing the document. It was never used.

On 3 April General Hawley instructed the Operations Division to draw up plans for a table of organization which would eliminate all specialist teams and reconstitute the Group as a collection of general surgical teams. Major Graves had many conferences on how this should be done. The only tan-

gible result was the transfer of two neurosurgeons and one plastic surgeon.

On 14 April Colonel Cutler instructed Major Graves to reorganize his roster in such a way that there would be one splint team and one shock team for every surgical team. Again Major Graves was on the spot because a splint or shock team sounded about like the end of the line to most Third Auxers.

On 15 April a letter arrived from Colonel Blatt with the request that all records be sent to the North African theater. This request was shelved because General Hawley insisted that the Third Aux remain at least nominally under his control. Again much futile correspondence.

On 13 May another request arrived from Colonel Blatt to have the Group in England sent to North Africa. Cheltenham now really got busy. When the smoke had cleared, the War Department itself had made the decision: the Third Aux was to stay in England.

On 8 June Operations made up a new table of organization which dropped the nurses, revamped the personnel, and added greatly to the transportation. The idea was to build the Third Aux in England into a full-sized Group. On 10 June 69 enlisted men were assigned as initial fillers.

On 23 June all this was cancelled. Now the War Department reversed itself and decided that the whole Third Aux was to be reassembled in North Africa. Much scurrying about.

On 15 July when the tentative sailing date had been set for September and when all the new rosters, tables, and inventories had been consigned to the waste basket, word came down from Cheltenham: "Hold everything. You can stay here after all."

On 3 August the excess enlisted strength was dropped. The only permanent gain out of the transaction was Lieutenant Sensenbach.

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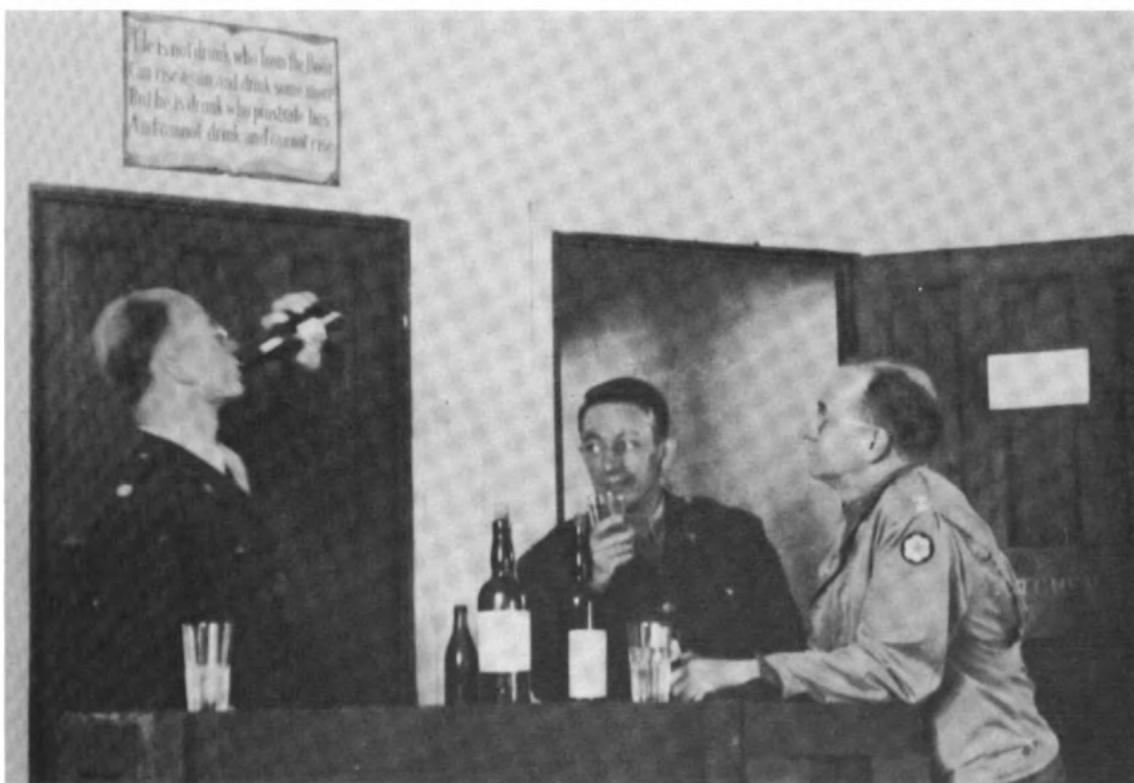
On 21 August Major Graves was greeted with a teletype message: "Third Auxiliary Surgical Group to be shipped to North Africa as soon as First Auxiliary Surgical Group arrives in England." (The First Aux had been organized at Fort Sam Houston in December 1942 and was due in England in September 1943.)

September was exceptional. There was no news. The men spent their time practicing with the bedding roll.

On 4 October came the final pronouncement: "Stay where you are. You will be joined by the Mediterranean contingent soon." This was the last order in the dizzying series.

From all this it can be seen that life at Sudbury was not as placid as it looked on the surface. Some Third Auxers took it calmly, some gnashed their teeth, and some coined new expressions. Captain Hoffman took the prize. His description: 1 race, rat, large.

The general unrest was broken somewhat toward the middle of September by the news that the Sudbury camp was to be taken over by the 108th General Hospital. The 28th Station Hospital went to Ireland and the Third Aux moved to a new camp at Shugborough Park. In this triple shift the Third Aux came out the winner because Shugborough was beautiful. Situated some



Major Graves drowns his sorrows:

"He is not drunk who from the floor  
Can rise again and drink some more  
But he is drunk who prostrate lies  
And cannot drink and cannot rise."

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twenty-five miles southwest of Sudbury, the grounds stretched all the way from the confluence of the rivers Trent and Sow to the Cannock Chase. There were stands of magnificent beech trees, miles of winding footpaths, and views of rural charm. This was the estate of Lord and Lady Lichfield. Third Auxers spent many an hour admiring it.

For a brief two months the Third Aux surrounded itself with something resembling comfort. The post was large enough to house three auxiliary surgical groups. Now for once there were plenty of tables, plenty of chairs, plenty of stoves, plenty of coal, plenty of everything. A few of the huts were opened, furnished, and trans-

formed into a reasonable facsimile of home. A club room got under way, activities picked up, and the Third Aux acquired a mascot. The club room especially was a popular spot because Captain Maloney always kept a pot of coffee brewing there. To shunt inspectors away, Maloney instructed Kleinhardt to paint out the sign OFFICERS CLUB and to substitute OFFICERS LECTURE HALL. This prompted Kleinhardt to the following doggerel:

Go to, and change the names of things,  
It will not fill us with dismay.  
The comfort that a proverb brings  
Makes everything okay.



Shugborough Manor had all the traditional beauty of a great English estate.

## DEAR OLD ENGLAND ISN'T THE SAME

"A rose smells like a rose," I'm told,  
Although its name be changed.  
Its fragrant perfume, clear and cold  
Defies the rules arranged.

Marie was christened Mary  
Before the fashion came;  
So, though her name may vary  
We know she's still the same.

In camp the food we eat is chow;  
To call it food would be a shame.  
I would submit with humble bow  
"Each one for me is still the same."

I could go on forever,  
Give samples such as those,  
But out-do I could never  
The one Maloney chose.

That building by the towers  
Holds PERSONNEL and such  
And OFFICERS MESS and flowers  
And anything the hand can clutch.

So now, the trick that's best of all,  
This place of brass recess:  
They call it now a LECTURE HALL  
But it's still an OFFICERS MESS.

The social program came to a climax with the Halloween dance, the most ambitious party yet. An entire ward was converted into a ballroom. Guests came from near and far. Music and liquor were of the best. The committee had even provided favors. Every officer received a handsome paperweight made from masonry that was chipped from

the Houses of Parliament by German bombs. Another chapter was coming to a close.

On 24 November Colonel Blatt brought his contingent back from Sicily and installed it temporarily in Lichfield Barracks. There was great rejoicing and on 7 December the reunion was duly celebrated with a dance at the Lichfield Barracks Officers Club.

The two halves of the Group continued their separate existence until Colonel Blatt found suitable quarters. He selected Bewdley, not by preference but by necessity. The Lichfield contingent arrived there on 19 December and the Shugborough contingent on 22 December. The Third Aux was together again.



Aux.



Bewdley from the air. Upper camp on the left, lower camp on the right.



## Chapter VII



### The Lull Before the Storm

Bewdley was grim. In the dead of winter the hutments sprawled over a barren slope without trees, without grass, without shrubs, without any of the features that had made Shugborough so attractive. The nearby village of Stourport was unprepossessing. The countryside was bleak. The prospects for early work were nil.

Instead of snug Nissen huts, Bewdley had only cavernous hutments that defied every effort at comfort. Colonel Blatt and Major Harper moved their beds to their office. Major Graves and Major Gates were jammed in a storage closet. A few of the ranking officers had private cubicles. All the others were scattered haphazardly through the yawning interior of two unfurnished hutments. Belongings went on the floor. Cots became writing desks, card tables, and lunch counters. Intellectual pursuits were limited to chess and poker. In the storage closet no activity of any kind was possible, except religious meditation. Major Gates tacked a sign on the door:

Graves-Gates Retreat  
Early morning devotions  
Midday sacred music  
Candlelight vesper service  
Confessions every Wednesday  
Come one and all

The place was full of physical as well as mental hazards, not the least of which was the water reservoir. This reservoir was sandwiched in between two hutments and

reached to within a few feet of a cement walk. No fence or sign guarded the spot. The inevitable happened on a particularly dark and sinister night.

Major Whitsitt and Captain Black arrived at Bewdley from an assignment in Birmingham. Never having seen the camp before, they asked for directions. "Just follow the walk," they were told. The men hurried along, Whitsitt well in front. Suddenly Black heard a terrific splash, followed by an ominous silence. He stopped. What was this? An ambush? Had the camp been seized by German parachutists? He called out:

"Jim! Where are you? Can you hear me?"

No answer. This meant foul play. Drawing his surgeon's scalpel (the only weapon he had with him at this moment), Black advanced slowly, ready to snatch his comrade from the clutches of the invaders. Finally he was able to pierce the darkness and he saw a placid pool with Whitsitt's head in the middle.

"Why—you son of a gun! Why don't you say something?"

"Damn it, Blackie. At least you could do me the pleasure of walking in too!"

The Third Aux had been earmarked for First Army. It was not immediately possible to attach the Group to First Army because troop lists as yet made no provision for auxiliary surgical groups. This technicality was remedied in the spring. Liaison work

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began at once. A field army at full strength has three corps and each corps has three divisions—a total of 100,000 fighting men. In January 1944 First Army was far short of this number. Army Headquarters however had been operating in Bristol since the previous October and here Colonel Blatt established contact with such men as the Army Surgeon, Colonel Rogers, the Army Surgical Consultant, Lieutenant Colonel Crisler and the Chief of Operations, Colonel Snyder. These men sat down to discuss the deployment of the Group.

Next came the internal reorganization. Major Harper continued as Executive Officer, Major Graves reverted to his status as Plans and Training Officer, Major Maloney carried on as Detachment Commander, and Lieutenant Sensenbach became Assistant Adjutant under Lieutenant Penterman. Chief Nurse Moline was replaced with Lieutenant Niemeyer. First Sergeants Nelson and Humes continued to operate in their capacities.

The Third Aux also lost a number of its most valuable officers at this time. These included such stalwarts as Majors Gates, Hatt, Broyles, Rilling, Block, and several others. Somewhat later there was an exchange of officers with the 44th Evacuation Hospital and a dozen nurses were transferred to other, more static organizations.

The Third Aux now embarked on its final training program, based on the experience of those who had just returned from the Mediterranean Theater. Major Graves arranged a series of conferences and demonstrations illustrating the practical side of field surgery. Here the veterans from Sicily showed the others how to make Tobruk splints, flutter valves, lighted retractors, pelvic rests, suction pumps, traction jackets, transfusion equipment, and many other useful devices. Outside speakers were brought in and Third Auxers were sent out. There

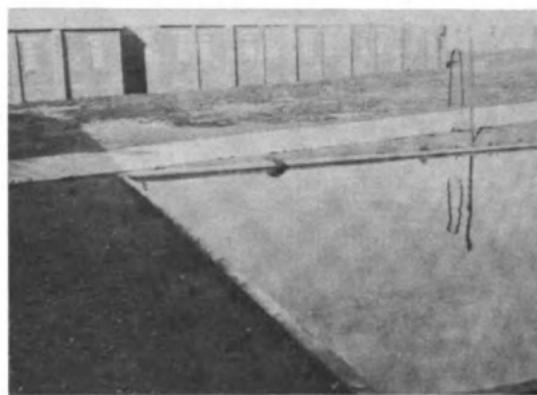
was so much material that it took a full two months to digest it.

The nurses were not forgotten because it was already known that they would be working with the teams. They brushed up on their technique, prepared numerous drape sheets, and even mastered the portable autoclaves. These women did themselves proud.

During April and May, five mobile surgical units were delivered to the Third Aux. These were of two types: the PROCO type and the surgical truck type. The story of these units is well worth telling.

*The PROCO unit.* This was the name for a whole class of new equipment that was developed especially for the invasion of Normandy (the abbreviation stands for *Project for Continental Operations*).

The father of the PROCO unit was Colonel Cutler. Colonel Cutler had seen the *Groupe Complémentaire* in action during the First World War and when he arrived in England in the spring of 1942, he wanted a similar unit for the American Army. Accordingly, he instructed Lieutenant Colonel Zollinger of the 5th General Hospital to develop a pilot model. It has already been pointed out how the reports from North



The water reservoir, site of subtle treachery.

## THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

Africa strengthened Colonel Cutler in his convictions. Colonel Zollinger demonstrated his unit on 18 May 1943. It consisted of two tents with operating table, generators, sterilizing equipment, and a number of small items that were stored in sixteen medical chests. The entire unit could be carried on one 2½-ton truck.

On 28 June the unit was turned over to the Third Aux for further development. Captain Maloney spent a great deal of time during the ensuing two months ironing out the kinks. And kinks there were. The reason was that the warehouses in England did not always have the desired items and even when they did, the supply officers were not always willing to fill requisitions without a table of allowances. Colonel Zollinger had had to cut corners. His product was a composite of many different kinds of equipment, both American and British.

Captain Maloney and his men worked hard. The tentage was increased, black-out entrances were provided, the electrical plant was streamlined, transfusion equipment was revamped, the generator was stepped up, the stoves were improved, transportation was expanded, and a water trailer was included. Two essential items were added: an anesthesia machine and a suction machine. The unit was tested under the most varied conditions and it was demonstrated repeatedly at the Medical Field Service School in Shrivenham. In September Captain Maloney handed in his recommendations for a table of allowances.

The revised table was approved by the Theater Surgeon and by the Commanding General of the ETO but it was disapproved by the War Department because of the parallelism with the surgical trucks. However, through the influence of Colonel Cutler, the plans were eventually submitted to the War Planning Board and approved as a PROCO. The Services of Supply then au-

thorized the construction of twenty-four experimental models, but refused the request for additional personnel. The units arrived in England on 1 March 1944 and the Third Aux received three of them a few weeks later.

When Major Maloney inspected the various chests and crates, he hardly recognized his brain child. So many substitutions had been made that the total bulk was three times the original. Some of these substitutions were crippling, others ludicrous. Certain essential items, such as the electrical wiring and the autoclaves, were left out completely. The Quartermaster had added a portable Castle light but a Castle light is not sufficient at an operating table. The generators were so large that they took up all the space in the one truck that was supposed to carry the entire unit. Oxygen tanks had been left out and nitrous oxide substituted, although nitrous oxide alone could never be used. The sixteen *empty* medical chests that were needed turned out to be sixteen *packed* chests and their contents was first aid equipment! For good measure, several typewriters had been thrown in. But the prize was the castor oil. The requisition had called for a three ounce bottle, to be used as eye drops. The Quartermaster supplied the oil only in ten-gallon cans. A ten-gallon can was what the unit got!



The PROCO unit.

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Undaunted, Major Maloney started to set things aright. The equipment was of six different kinds: medical, quartermaster, signal, engineer, ordnance, and adjutant general. Each department had its own supply dumps. One kind of wire might be stocked at one dump and another kind of wire at another dump! Major Maloney scurried from one end of the country to the other and with much bickering was able to rehabilitate the units. Transportation was adjusted to three personnel-carriers and one water trailer. The units were now ready to go into action.

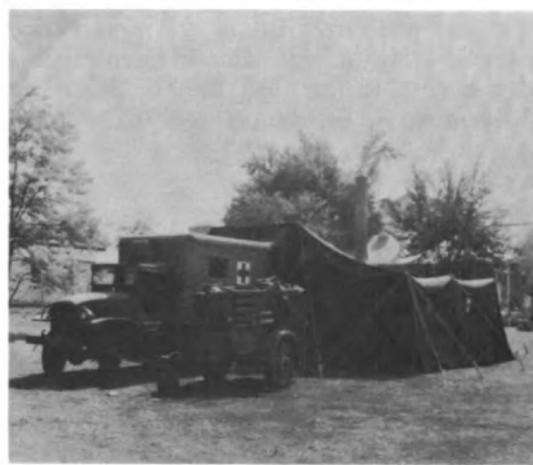
*The Surgical Truck, Operating.* When General Kirk inspected the battle front in Tunisia he not only realized the difficulties under which the surgical teams labored but he also saw the type of vehicle that could be readily adapted to the purpose he had in mind. This was the surgical truck of the armored division. As early as 1941, the 1st Armored Division and the Equipment Laboratory at Carlisle had collaborated on the design of a mobile operating room. It was soon realized that the interior of a 2½-ton truck, no matter how well designed, can never make a satisfactory operating room simply because there is not enough space. Therefore it was decided to build a lean-to tent and use it as an operating room. Such units were used in Tunisia and were found highly practicable for surgery of the clearing station type. To adapt them for the use of a surgical team doing first-priority surgery, it was necessary only to make certain modifications. General Kirk ordered these modifications as soon as he returned to Washington.

The work was done during the summer of 1943 at the Equipment Laboratory. General Kirk's orders were for a tent with double walls, tarpaulin floor, black-out entrance,

and room for two operating tables. It was to be so constructed that it would be possible to go from the truck to the tent without breaking the black-out. The pilot model was passed on by the First Aux and tested by the Fourth Aux. Further improvements were made. Construction began late in 1943 and the first trucks arrived in England in April. The Third Aux received two of these.

As soon as they inspected the equipment, Third Auxers saw that their own PROCO unit had been eclipsed. In fact, the truck's facilities were in many respects superior to those of the field hospital. These advantages stood out immediately:

1. The operating tent of the surgical truck was better proportioned than the operating tent of a field hospital. The truck tent was square. The field hospital tent was rectangular. In a rectangular tent there is a constant traffic problem.
2. The truck tent was double-walled and the inside liner was painted white which added immeasurably to the efficiency of the lighting. The double walls also provided air-conditioning. In ad-



The surgical truck.

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dition, the truck tent had a canvas floor, a ready-made black-out entrance, and a large window. The field hospital tent had none of these and was particularly uncomfortable because of the wide swing in temperatures.

3. The equipment of the surgical truck included many highly desirable items that field hospitals either lacked or were constantly short of: bronchoscopes, chest instruments, a fracture table, suction machines, rubber aprons, and many more. In fact, the only major deficiency of the truck was the lack of an anesthesia machine.
4. In the surgical truck all the equipment was carried in one vehicle. Nothing could get lost. When equipment is scattered over several trucks as it is with clearing stations and field hospitals, the loss of one truck cripples the entire station.
5. The surgical truck was commodious enough to carry the entire team in addition to the equipment. In the combat zone a team with its own transportation has a tremendous advantage.

Thus, the surgical truck seemed to be the

answer to many of the problems that had plagued the Third Aux from the beginning and it might be thought that everybody could now sit back and relax. But such was not to be. The mobile surgical units rank as one of the minor fiascos of the great invasion. What happened?

When the units arrived in England, D Day was only a few short months away. Loading lists had been made up long before. There was no room for additional equipment. The units had to wait. And yet, the crying need for them was during the *early* days of the beachhead. On Omaha, clearing stations were as much as three days behind schedule and field hospitals even more. It was during this phase that the added equipment would have been priceless.

After the units did arrive, they were immediately put in the field. But the greatest bottle neck had already passed. Medical supplies began to catch up. Nevertheless, two surgical trucks and two PROCO units saw service through most of the Normandy campaign and they fully established their worth. They were highly mobile, thoroughly trustworthy, and eminently practical. If they had any faults, they were minor faults:

1. It might be said that the units required more personnel than a surgical team could spare. In this respect they were inefficient. To operate the autoclave and the generator took one full-time man. A team could not spare a technician for this purpose. Moreover, this service was already provided by the hospital. The individual servicing of the unit was a duplication of effort.
2. The essential elements of a field hospital should be under one roof. This was difficult when a mobile unit was part of the set-up. The special tent did



The X-ray Unit

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not fit in well with the usual arrangement of four ward-tents in the form of a cross.

In spite of their many good points, the units were never used to any great extent. They were designed at a time when the field hospital had not yet appeared on the scene. Once these hospitals took over, the need for the units was largely eliminated. Even under stress and strain, field hospital commanders preferred to use their own equipment, rather than call on the units. In the eyes of these commanders, the units were competitors. Consequently, they died a natural death. Bit by bit, the trucks were dismantled. Some were converted into living quarters by higher headquarters. Some were kept merely as transportation. Some became mobile supply rooms. All were eventually returned to the medical dumps, mere skeletons. The experiment failed for lack of coordination.

The Third Aux acquired still another type of mobile unit: the x-ray unit. Early in the fall of 1943 Colonel Allen, the Radiological Consultant for the ETO, returned from the



General Rogers, First Army Surgeon.

battle front in Italy with the recommendation that mobile x-ray units be developed. He called on the Third Aux for advice on field equipment. Again the basic vehicle was a 2½-ton truck, backed up against a small wall tent. Again there were numerous difficulties because there was no official table of allowances. These difficulties were eventually overcome however and a number of the units took to the field. A brief analysis of their work appears in the statistical section.

Meanwhile an important change took place at Headquarters. On 21 February Colonel Blatt, who had served his unit wisely and well, changed places with the Commanding Officer of the 44th Evacuation Hospital, Lieutenant Colonel Elmer A. Loddell. On 24 April, Major Harry P. Harper, left to take command of the 51st Field Hospital. His place was taken by Major William F. Maley who continued in this capacity until 22 August. Then Lieutenant Colonel Carl C. Francis became executive officer and Major Maley became a special liaison officer.

On 20 March Third Auxers had their first look at the First Army Surgeon, Colonel John A. Rogers. Colonel Rogers came to Bewdley to brief the Group. Without mentioning names or places, he drew the following picture:

1. For the invasion the general surgical teams would be attached to the medical battalions of the engineers special brigades. These battalions would come ashore at approximately H plus four, well ahead of the division medical battalions. The teams would do the surgery at the clearing stations set up by these special medical battalions.
2. One general surgical team would be attached to each airborne division for a glider landing well in advance of H Hour.

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3. As soon as the field hospitals arrived, the teams would transfer to these hospitals and do all first-priority surgery.
4. Specialist teams would follow as soon as possible and work wherever their services would be most valuable.
5. Nurses would come in with the evacuation hospitals, but only for the crossing of the Channel. On landing, they would be attached to the field hospitals. They would be under the administrative control of the hospital but under the professional control of the teams.
6. An advance Third Aux Headquarters would be landed early so that the commanding officer would keep in close touch with the teams from the very beginning.
7. Field hospital personnel would be notified that their functions were primarily administrative, rather than professional.
8. In the evacuation hospitals the teams would function under the chief of surgery.

These words were music to the Third Auxers because it was exactly what they had been fighting for.

On 25 March another important visitor appeared. He was Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Crisler, Surgical Consultant for First Army. As supervisor of all surgery in First Army hospitals, he was vitally interested in the teams. His guiding hand became immediately apparent. Together with Colonel Lodmell, he interviewed all the prospective team leaders and briefed them on their responsibilities. A team roster was now compiled, with each team made up of four officers and four men. The stage was set.

The first orders arrived shortly afterwards. Between 27 March and 22 April, twenty teams left Bewdley to take up station

with the medical battalions in the south of England. The assignments were as follows:

1. Teams 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6  
261st Medical Battalion  
First Engineers Special Brigade
2. Teams 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12  
61st Medical Battalion  
Fifth Engineers Special Brigade
3. Teams 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18  
60th Medical Battalion  
Sixth Engineers Special Brigade
4. Team 19  
307th Medical Company  
82nd Airborne Division
5. Team 20  
326th Medical Company  
101st Airborne Division

This left only five teams at the home base. Teams 20, 22, and 23 were used to establish liaison with the field hospitals. Teams 24 and 25 were used to man the mobile units.

Of these assignments, the ones with the airborne divisions were the most dangerous and Colonel Lodmell called for volunteers. He did not lack applicants.

During the weeks immediately preceding the invasion, the south of England was a scene of feverish activity. Around the three loading ports there was rapidly assembling the greatest assault army in history. This was the time when the prodigious equipment of the American Army overran the English countryside and overwhelmed its inhabitants. Monstrous bulldozers, giant tanks, waddling long-toms, grotesque ducks, armored cars, lumbering trucks, slithering jeeps, boats on wheels, all these strange inventions were fighting for the right of way on country lanes that had never seen anything heavier than a bicycle. To the uninitiated, the scene was one of indescribable confusion. Wags quipped that the Nazis might have the original blueprints but that they couldn't possibly keep up with all the changes.

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And yet, a few miles to the north, there was still peace and quiet. Mailmen made their rounds, farmers tended their lands, factory workers did their daily stint. The Stratford season opened with the usual gathering of dignified dowagers, high-brow critics, one-day trippers, and all-season campers. London theaters were jammed. Oxford students crammed for exams. Business went on as usual. And with all this, two tremendous armies were preparing to fight the most momentous battle in history. It was

this contrast that made the final weeks so unreal. These clattering guns and sleepy farms, these roaring planes and quiet rivers, these rushing soldiers and leisurely sight-seers, these thundering convoys and fragile bicycles existed side by side as if to underscore that the world would go on, no matter what the outcome of the battle. To Third Auxers it was like a dream.

But there was not much time to dream. In the ten weeks that were left, Third Auxers had two jobs to do: they had to get the

*The south of England was a scene of feverish activity.*



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special equipment they needed and they had to test this equipment on maneuvers. It was a task that required all their energy and ingenuity.

In the pre-Sicily days, the teams had had hard going. The warehouses were empty, the supply officers uncooperative, and the clearing station personnel skeptical. But this time it was different. Now the men were veterans and they gave their orders with knowledge and authority. Under their supervision, electricians wired reflectors, batteries, and operating lights. Carpenters built stock tables, saw-horses, and plaster boards. Ordnance mechanics made Mayo stands, intravenous poles, and water taps. Technicians tested autoclaves, basic sets, and medical chests. Nurses sewed laparotomy sheets, glove containers, and muslin wrappers. Buck privates pitched tents, strung wire, and fired stoves. Some equipment, such as anesthesia machines and suction machines, was obtained only at the last minute. Other equipment, such as intestinal sutures, Levin tubes, and bronchoscopic sets, was never obtained at all. But on the whole, an admirable job was done.

Next, the teams helped in making up the loading schedules. With only three trucks available for each clearing station, all items had to be carefully evaluated for priority. Chests were packed and repacked, trucks were loaded and unloaded, tents were pitched and struck until the men could go through their paces in the dark. This was the real thing. Morale soared.

The teams with the airborne divisions were especially busy. This was the first time that surgical teams would be landed by glider. Everything had to be worked out to the last detail. After many trials, it became evident that all the surgical equipment had to be concentrated in a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trailer. This was packed with basic instrument sets, anesthesia supplies, splints, litters, plasma,

plaster, dressings, and miscellaneous articles. Key-equipment had to be distributed over several carriers because some would almost certainly be lost in landing. To guard against total loss, each enlisted man was given a canvas kit containing sterile instruments, towels, bandages, tourniquets, morphine syrettes, and similar small items. Parachute bundles were made up with replenishments. Only with many precautions could one be certain that major surgery would indeed be possible from the very beginning.

The next thing was the maneuvers. As early as Christmas 1943, a few teams had been sent on bivouacs with the 29th Division, but not until the spring of 1944 was



Captain Charles Van Gorder demonstrates what the well-dressed airborne surgeon wears on an invasion.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

it possible to have large-scale, realistic rehearsals. Whole divisions were taken out to sea and sent ashore against an imaginary enemy. Slapton Sands became the scene of unwanted activity.

The maneuvers were known by such fascinating names as DUCK, BEAVER, and TIGER, but they were not at all fascinating. Third Auxers agreed that, except for the absence of real danger, these maneuvers were more exhausting, more testing, and more painful than the real thing. Here is a condensed version of Major Campbell's trek to Wollcombe Beach.

"We left Torquay on open trucks in a driving rain. Of course it was midnight. In the Army you always move at midnight. We tried to protect ourselves with our rain-coats and with the tarpaulins but it was futile. Nothing keeps rain out of an open truck.

From Torquay to the Bristol Channel is only about a hundred miles. Just a nice jog when you are out joy riding. But that open truck took five hours over it. Early in the morning, before the sun had even made a dent in the grayness, we got out, cold, wet, and numb. Thank goodness we're through with that, we thought and looked around hopefully for a place to warm up. Our place was a nice, cozy duck, and it wasn't warm. We piled in.

A duck is a great invention but the novelty of riding in one soon wears off. They're not made for comfort. When the water is the least bit rough, you get a constant spray. With us it didn't make much difference because we were wet already. There was a brisk southwester blowing and the sea got rougher the farther we got out. After we fed the fish with our breakfast of biscuits

and cheese, we turned around and came right back to the same spot we started from. Now for a good hot breakfast, we thought. Our C.O. had other plans. 'Get up that hill and make it snappy!' he hollered.

The hill was long and sandy and it got pretty steep towards the end. When we got to the top we were bushed. 'Pitch tents,' came the order. 'And make it snappy.' Have you ever tried to pitch a tent when you are sick to your stomach, wet to the bone, panting for breath, and shaking with exertion? Brother, it's no fun.

And then, after all that mad dash, we just sat there for three days. Yes sir, we just sat there and lived on chocolate bars and stale cheese. Not so much as a cup of coffee. From that little trip I learned just one thing: if you survive one maneuver, you're good for ten battles."

Third Auxers did go through a real battle on one of these maneuvers. And a very one-sided battle it was. Captain Horvitz has given a graphic account of it.

"It was on the morning of 27 April 1944 that we left Plymouth Harbor. The code name for the maneuver was TIGER. It was a Thursday morning. The sun was warm and bright and was reflected like myriads of dancing diamonds from the water of the Channel. It was a peaceful Channel. We were all set for a pleasure cruise.

We had embarked a couple of days before and had waited in the harbor for the maneuver to begin. The actual maneuver was to take place at Slapton Sands, a number of miles farther up the South Coast of England. It was practice invasion. Dress rehearsal for D Day. According to the plan we were supposed to leave for the invasion coast on

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that morning, but not to land on the beach until the morning of the following day.

Our own convoy consisted of seven LST's, all loaded to the gills with implements and personnel for invasion. Six hundred men, approximately, in addition to the crew. We, that is Company B of the 261st Medical Battalion and its attached two surgical teams, were on LST #511, the third from the end in the line of seven as we left Plymouth. As we steamed out, the routine General Quarters alarm was sounded. It means a call to battle stations. Everyone proceeds at once to the position or job he is to occupy in case of battle. It's a rather frightening sound—loud enough to wake the dead. Everyone remains at his station until the signal is given that General Quarters is over. Our team was to take its station in the ward room. That is the small club and dining room for the officers. It was located in the mid portion of the ship—upper deck level. It all being practice, we just went there when the General Quarters alarm sounded and remained there until it was over.

It was a beautiful morning. The seven ships made an impressive sight outlined against the clear sky. One of the ship's ensigns told me we were scheduled to pass by Slapton Sands sometime during the middle of the afternoon, but that we would continue on by, moving slowly along the Channel, turn around during the night, and come on in to land on the beach at eight the next morning. I asked him if we were to have any protection now that we were moving farther out into the Channel. 'There's supposed to be a corvette somewhere,' he said.

It was around three o'clock in the afternoon when we passed Slapton Sands. We could make out some of the activity going on around the beach. The first boats were supposed to have landed and discharged their personnel and materiel at eight o'clock that morning. We could hear some guns. Every-

thing was proceeding according to plan. We continued on, moving farther out into the Channel. The coast jutted outward and we lost sight of the beach.

Maurice Schneider and I decided to turn in about midnight. The majors had their quarters on deck level along with the Naval officers. The rest of us slept in bunks in a compartment in the forward part of the ship—the first level below deck. The enlisted men had to sleep anywhere they could make themselves reasonably comfortable.

It was exactly 2:00 A.M. when General Quarters alarm went off. We, thinking it was but practice, were hesitant to get dressed. But that was all decided when one of the crew came rushing through, closing off the steel water-tight compartment doors. 'This is it, boys,' he said. 'Ship torpedoed behind us.' We dressed, put on our life belts and helmets, and ran up on deck, intending to go on to the ward room. As we came out on deck, we saw a large orange moon hanging very low on the horizon. It looked as though it was just about to fall into the water. It was cool, and we were shivering a little; maybe it wasn't entirely the cold. What attracted our attention almost immediately was a large fire burning out in the Channel about a mile behind us. It was obviously the last LST in our convoy—burning and going down. U-boats or E-boats? We didn't know that minute.

There was only one LST behind us now. We could make out its outlines readily in the light of the moon. It was coming on about a hundred yards behind us. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion. It had a dull sound, as though a great heavy mass had fallen onto a heavily carpeted floor. The LST right behind us burst into a great mass of flame all at once. The torpedo must have struck her in the powder magazine because she seemed to have disintegrated with that one burst. Things began to happen on our own ship. It wasn't more than a minute

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and all hell seemed to break loose all around me. Colored flashes of light. For a stunned second I didn't realize what they were. But then I knew. Tracer bullets. The yellow and purple ones were coming out of the water from the German E-boats. The pink ones were going into the water from our own anti-aircraft guns.

There was a lot of shouting and confusion on deck. If I knew then what I have learned since, I would have fallen flat on my stomach and stayed there, but I didn't. I ducked my head and ran, and after what seemed an age finally reached the middle portion of the ship, found a doorway, and dashed in. I decided I'd better get to the ward room. As I came down the narrow corridor toward the ward room, a soldier came running toward me, holding his hands over his belly. 'I've been hit,' he cried. He fell down at my feet. I looked at his clothing and they appeared to be undamaged. I thought at first that maybe he was hysterical. But I opened his shirt. There was an abdominal wound. The fragment had gone in. I had some soldiers carry him into the ward room. Now that I had something to do, I felt better. Casualties began to be brought in. We administered first aid and treated shock. There was nothing else that we could do at the time.

While we worked, the shooting on our boat stopped. It hadn't lasted very long—maybe a few minutes. But the show wasn't over. The E-boats sent a torpedo into the LST directly in front of us. Then some more shooting. The convoy was now broken up. It was every ship for itself. We headed for nearest land, which was twenty miles away. We couldn't send for help because there was radio silence. To have used the radio would have meant giving away our position as well as that of the boats which still remained afloat. I found out later that the captain of our ship had no chart, no idea of the mine-fields that had been laid down by the British.

Even if he had been able to call for help, it could never get to us in time. The corvette that was supposed to be our protection we never saw. We learned later it had been sunk.

We sat and waited for the torpedo we knew would come. Our work was done. There was nothing to do but wait. But the torpedo never came. The only way we could figure it was that they had run out of torpedoes. Nothing else was there to stop them.

At about six o'clock in the morning in the gray mist we were able to make out land. Columbus himself couldn't have been happier at the sight of land than we were that morning. An hour later, we were anchored in the little harbor of Weymouth. Three other LST's showed up. Four of us left out of seven. (The two behind us had been sunk, the one in front hit but remained afloat and later pulled in.)

We unloaded our casualties—19 on our LST. These included the captain, who had been hit in the leg while standing on the bridge, the executive officer, who lost his right eye, the radioman, who was hit in the arm and in the scrotum; he lost one testicle. Fortunately no one on our ship was killed. Ralph Coffey went along with those evacuated to the nearest hospital—the British Naval Hospital at Weymouth. The rest of us remained on board.

Shortly before noon we got under way again. General Quarters alarm was sounded as we were leaving the harbor. I knew it was routine, yet it evoked similar emotions to those which I had felt that previous night. It was as though a conditioned reflex had suddenly taken possession of me. This time, as we came out of the harbor, we were joined by two British destroyers. It was like closing the barn door after the horse is gone. But we were very happy to have them.

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Almost 1,200 lives were lost in that maneuver. We felt that it had been a rather expensive session. We landed at Slapton Sands at eight o'clock that evening, just twelve hours behind schedule. The earth felt good under our feet.

Our clearing station was set up exactly as it was going to be set up on the invasion beach, a month later. I pitched my pup tent for the first time. I fell asleep right away but was awakened by an air raid during the middle of the night. A German plane was shot down just a short distance from our field. As it fell, it sounded as though it was coming right down on my little tent. But that's the way they always sound.

Saturday and Sunday were beautiful days and we relaxed in the sun. On Monday 1 May we packed up and drove back to our camp at Truro. The maneuver was over. We all got drunk that night."

Besides the men on the TIGER exercise, one other Third Auxer came close to losing his life on maneuvers. This was Torp. Torp had asked for his assignment to the Third Aux "so that he could devote himself to professional work." It was on the DUCK maneuver that Torp met his Waterloo.

Troops were debarking from LCT's into LCI's. The trick was to slide down a rope ladder and make a neat contact with the bobbing, slippery surface below. In calm weather, this was easy. In rough weather, when both vessels were rocked in uneven rhythm, it was decidedly tricky. When Torp started down, he knew that he was in for trouble. In the first place, he was not used to violent exertions and in the second place, his physical proportions made it difficult for him to see what was going on down below. Halfway down he hesitated. Should he try to reach that treacherous void or

should he clamber back towards the safety of the mother vessel? In this extremity he had an open mind.

It so happened that on the other side of the ship a similar debarkation was taking place. A loud-mouthed boatswain with a megaphone was bellowing to one of his men: "Let go, you fathead!" His voice carried to all parts of the ship. To Torp it was the inspiration he had been waiting for. Without a further look he released his hold and obeyed the law of gravity, a most natural thing to do for a man of his dimensions.

At this moment the two vessels were separated about six feet and into this chasm Torp disappeared. Sailors sprung into action. They lowered ropes, threw out life belts, kept the ships from grinding together. A few minutes later Torp was standing on the deck of the LCI, surrounded by his half-snicker, half-solicitous team mates. "A fine outfit this is. Here I expect to do professional work and look how I wind up. I quit!"

Thus, Third Auxers had their problems, large and small. And yet, with all the tumult and confusion, there was one man who had the enthusiasm to win the girl of his choice. Captain Joe met Kay at a dance in Bromsgrove just before he shipped off to the staging area. It was a whirlwind courtship. Joe settled the matter with his usual vim and vigor. He would marry Kay, come hell or high water.

Although over fifty thousand Americans acquired English wives overseas, the course of true love in those days was not a smooth one. With an eye on the many natural obstacles, Army authorities had set up an elaborate cooling-off process. The request for permission had to be passed up the line of command to its ultimate pinnacle, a journey of many weeks. Then, if the decision was favorable, the applicants had to wait sixty days before they could apply for a license. Joe knew that he had a mighty hurdle to

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overcome. He put his papers in, said a prayer, and waited.

Three weeks went by. Four weeks went by. Five weeks went by. Joe was now in the staging area with one foot practically in the water. Still no answer. He decided to investigate. At Medical Battalion Headquarters nobody even remembered having seen Joe's letter. Disgusted, Joe was on his way out the door when a sergeant spoke up.

"Wait a minute, Captain. Maybe it's in that pile over there."

The sergeant pointed to a stack of papers that had been gathering dust for weeks. Without any thought of success, Joe started leafing through. Suddenly he jumped a foot. There it was! His request! And there was the answer: "Permission granted. Applicants must wait for sixty days from date of last endorsement."

This was bad news. With the invasion only a month away, Joe was sunk. Nobody had authority to waive the sixty day waiting period except Army Headquarters. A second letter would surely bog down. So Joe decided to rewrite his request and hand-carry it. This meant that he had to gather all the intermediate signatures himself. First, the unit chaplain. Next, the commanding officer of the clearing company. Next, the commanding officer of the medical battalion. Next, the commanding general of the engineers special brigade. Finally, Army Headquarters. With so much practice, Joe learned to present his story in truly heart-rending fashion. Wherever he went he managed to get at least an encouraging hand shake and a sympathetic nod. Then he got to the end of the trail. The office of the Adjutant General.

There he struck the snag. In his ignorance that Army Headquarters considered the invasion still a top secret, Joe blurted out that he wanted to get married "before the invasion."

"What invasion?" inquired the colonel casually.

"Why, the invasion of Europe of course."

"Did you tell anyone that you were going on an invasion, Captain?" asked the Colonel, gradually warming up to such a dangerous possibility.

"Why . . . , no sir, not in so many words," said Joe, completely floored by this unexpected twist in the conversation.

"Captain, as far as you and your friends are concerned, you are here for a change and a rest. Now, go away. Don't bother me any more."

Then, as Joe was already in the door, the stern man suddenly relented.

"You might see the Chaplain though."

The Army Chaplain was a man whose religion was measured strictly in terms of directives. But there was something in Joe's urgent pleading that made him soften.

"I want to see this girl. If she is all you say, we will give you permission."

Joe was elated. He dashed out the door for the nearest telephone booth.

"Get on the train right away, dear. You've got to be here by tomorrow morning. Better get yourself a ring. I won't have time to buy one."

The south coast of England was a restricted area. No civilians could get in or out, except by special pass. Joe's bride-to-be had no pass but she had plenty of pluck. She talked her way past the police and she met Joe at the appointed hour. The Chaplain was impressed. He not only gave the couple his blessing but he even made the adjutant sign the papers right away. At last, things were beginning to move.

Flushed with their success, the couple now went to Torquay. There was no time to lose. Joe's Medical Battalion had been alerted and would be bottled up tight in a few days. Telegrams went out. Kay's parents and

## THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

friends were to be in Torquay the next day. Now for a priest. That was easy. The priest listened sympathetically. Yes, he would be delighted but did the affiants have their license? Joe had been so wrapped up in Army regulations that he had forgotten completely about the civil procedure. To the county clerk's office he went. The clerk was all smiles. For the small fee of ten shillings he would publish the banns and Joe could pick up the license three days later.

"Three days from now?" said Joe. "Why, that's ridiculous. I'll be with my outfit then."

"Sir, I'm sorry but that's the law and I have never made an exception in all my forty years in office."

Stymied by a stubborn county clerk! Who was this pipsqueak anyway? Joe would carry his cause to the registrar himself. But the registrar was adamant. Not even an invasion could change English law.

Things looked black. Another precious day had passed and Joe was no nearer his goal. With hanging head and sagging spirits he returned to Torquay.

The next day started badly. Wedding guests were beginning to arrive. Kay was in a dither. The people at the hotel wanted to know what time the wedding would take place. Joe felt sick. He wanted to get away from it all. Mumbling some feeble excuse, he put on his coat and wandered back to Battalion Headquarters. Here, things were even worse. Orders had arrived. The office was being packed up. Husky GI's were tugging at the desks, the tables, the safe. Joe sat down. He lit a cigarette and cursed all the county officials in the world.

Suddenly he heard a familiar voice. It was the adjutant, the same adjutant who had let Joe's letter gather dust.

"Well, if it isn't Captain Joe! How are you, doc?"

Joe could have killed the fellow but he restrained himself and said something about the weather.

"And what became of your request, Captain? Did it ever come through?"

"Blast it all," said Joe. "A fellow might as well try flying to the moon. I've seen everybody from a two-bit county clerk to the general and no luck. Think I'll go hang myself."

"Wait a minute, Captain. The Brigade Chaplain is a friend of mine. He knows a lot of people. I'll call him right away."

Joe accepted the suggestion with reservation. A few minutes later the adjutant came back.

"The chaplain wants to see you right away, Captain. He is at Headquarters."

The chaplain listened to Joe as if he were listening to his own son.

"We've got to see you through, Captain. I know the monsignor at Eppington. Let's go and see him."

The monsignor listened sympathetically but he confessed that he was powerless. No one had authority to tamper with the law of His Majesty's government. There followed a long list of reasons but Joe wasn't even listening. He was just thinking about all the people at Torquay who were waiting for the wedding. Then the chaplain spoke up.

"Father, would you have any objection if we saw the bishop about this?"

"Impossible. The bishop has just had a serious operation. He is in the hospital at Tavistock. Nobody is allowed to see him."

The chaplain and Joe went outside.

"We're going to Tavistock," said the chaplain.

At Tavistock, the bishop was recovering from nothing more serious than a tooth extraction and he listened closely to the two American officers.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

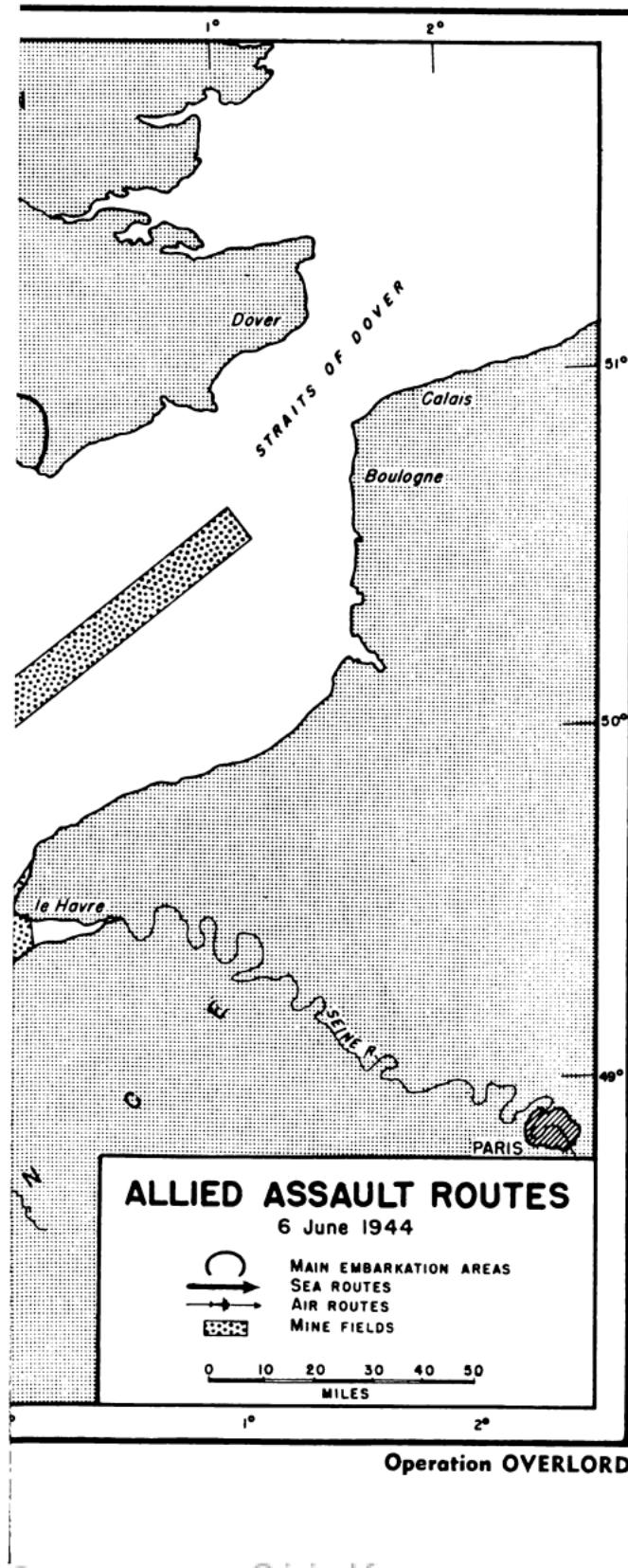
"And is there nothing that can be done for this impetuous officer and his charming fiancée?" was the chaplain's closing question.

"Well now, let me see. We had a case here during the last war. I believe there is a rule that this provision may be waived for members of the Forces. It's never come up before, but I see no reason why we could not apply the same rule to American servicemen. Wait a minute."

The bishop picked up a phone. A long conversation ensued. Then came the verdict: Joe could get his license right away. The bishop called the monsignor. The monsignor called the priest. The priest called the county clerk. The county clerk opened his office. The guests were notified. The license was issued. The priest came down. Joe and Kay were married. They had a one-day honeymoon and have lived happily ever after.



**The wedding party. Hurwitz, Hayman, Smazal, bridal couple, Barta, Netz, Sheldon, Campbell, Coffin, Noto.**







## Chapter VIII



### Normandy

The story of the Normandy invasion has been told so many times that it seems almost supererogatory to repeat it here. And yet, in order to make the role of the Third Aux clear, it is necessary to review at least the main features.

The entire operation had been planned in broad outline at the Quebec Conference in August 1943. The section of the French coast that was to be brought under attack stretched from the estuary of the Vire to that of the Orne. The American sector lay directly east of the Vire and was called Omaha Beach. On his arrival in England General Eisenhower decided that an additional beachhead was needed, one that gave a more direct access to Cherbourg. He selected a beach sector northwest of the Vire and gave it the name of Utah. The troops at Omaha were to engage the enemy while the troops at Utah made a dash for Cherbourg. The two separate beachheads were then rapidly to be consolidated.

Utah was the target of Force "U." The main elements of this force were the 4th Infantry Division and one combat team of the 90th Infantry Division. Special tank battalions and field artillery battalions would be in close support. The 1st Engineers Special Brigade would clear the beach of obstacles. The 82nd Airborne and the 101st Airborne Division would be dropped in the rear to seize the beach exits and prepare the

ground to the west. Over-all command was in the hands of VII Corps.

Omaha Beach was the target of Force "O." The main elements were the 1st Infantry Division and one combat team of the 29th Infantry Division. Support forces again included special tank battalions and armored field artillery battalions as well as a battalion of Rangers. Beach clearing would be in the hands of the 5th and 6th Engineers Special Brigades. Follow-up Force "B" consisting of the 29th Infantry Division plus engineer and artillery units would follow in about six hours. Over-all command was in the hands of V Corps.

The entire operation went by the name of OVERLORD. The American part was called NEPTUNE.

#### UTAH BEACH

The Utah sector was approximately five thousand yards long. At this point the beach was smooth with a gradual rise to a sea wall averaging six feet in height. In some places sand was piled against this wall to form a sort of natural ramp. Behind the wall, sand dunes stretched to a low-lying swamp that had been flooded by the Germans. This inundated area was one to two miles wide and was crossed by a number of causeways. The western exits of these causeways were to be seized by the airborne divisions.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

The German defenses consisted of obstacles in the water and strong points on the beach. The strong points were made up of pill boxes, Tobruk pits, firing dugouts, and underground shelters, interconnected by trenches and protected by mines and ditches. These defenses were much fewer than on Omaha because the enemy relied on the inundations as a natural obstacle. About two miles inland were several batteries of heavy and medium artillery.

### OMAHA BEACH

The Omaha sector was about seven thousand yards long. It was made up of a tidal flat averaging three hundreds yards in width and merging into a bank of coarse gravel. To the east this gravel merged with a low sand-embankment or dune line. To the west the gravel abutted on a sea wall varying from four to twelve feet in height. Between the sea wall and the bluff was a level shelf of sand. This measured as much as two hundred yards in the center but narrowed at either end. The bluffs rose sharply to a height of one hundred and fifty feet and provided a perfect defense line. Four small wooded valleys or draws ran inland at right angles. Each draw contained a road, mostly simple cart tracks. Beyond the dunes the country quickly became intersected with numerous hedgerows but otherwise offered few natural obstacles. The sector was limited both east and west by high cliffs. Of these cliffs the greatest threat was at Pointe du Hoe, about four miles west of Omaha. It was known that the Germans had heavy artillery here.

The assault plan divided Omaha into two subsectors. The eastern subsector consisted of Dog Green, Dog White, Dog Red, and Easy Green. The western subsector consisted of Easy Red, Fox Green, and Fox Red. The attacking force consisted of the 16th

Regimental Combat Team for the eastern subsector and the 116th Regimental Combat Team for the western subsector. The 18th RCT and the 115th RCT would land in support. These teams were heavily reinforced. A force of Rangers was to assault the cliffs at Pointe du Hoe.

The landing sequence of the assault troops was as follows. After an intense aerial and naval bombardment, two companies of amphibious tanks would swim ashore and take up firing positions at the water's edge. Their task was to put the remaining strong points out of commission and give covering fire for the infantry.

At H plus one minute, four infantry companies would touch down. This primary assault force was to cross the tidal flat immediately and concentrate on the strong points. While this was going on, a special engineer task force would come in at H plus five minutes. These troops were to demolish the beach obstacles and clear the mine fields.

Beginning at H plus thirty minutes, a second and larger group of assault infantry would come in, together with advance elements of the Engineers Special Brigade. These engineers were to stay on the beach while the infantry moved inland.

The first artillery would come in between H plus 90 and H plus 120 minutes. With the assault waves now firmly entrenched on the bluffs and with at least one of the beach exits cleared, the next wave was timed for H plus three hours and was to bring heavy vehicles: tanks, cranes, dozers, halftracks, and trucks of all types. They would arrive on rhino-ferries. All strong points on the beach were to be neutralized by H plus 3 hours.

Omaha was much better defended than Utah. Twelve strong points were located along the top of the bluff, flanking the draws. Each strong point was sited for both grazing and plunging fire. In addition there

## N O R M A N D Y

were no less than 35 pill boxes, 18 anti-tank guns, 40 rocket pits, and well over 60 artillery pieces, mainly of 75 and 88 mm caliber. Pointe du Hoe had a battery of 155 mm guns which could cover both Omaha and Utah. Beyond this shell, Omaha had little defense in depth. There were a few mine fields but no elaborate fortifications. On the morning of D Day, Omaha was manned by a battalion of German troops but these were quickly reinforced by other elements of the 352nd Division.

Let us now see how the medical plans had been fitted into this.

### *The Seaborne Elements*

In the order of their arrival on the beach, the medical units were as follows:

1. *The regimental medical detachments.* These would be landed with the assault units, starting at H Hour. (Each infantry regiment has a medical detachment consisting of three battalion medical sections which go wherever the fighting soldiers go.) These men would move inland with the attacking forces and would do no more than help with the collection of the casualties on the beach.
2. *The Naval beach medical sections.* These were small parties of Navy personnel that would be landed immediately following the battalion medical sections. They were to continue the work of collecting the casualties and of giving first aid. They would also evacuate the casualties seaward.
3. *The beach clearing stations.* These were the clearing stations operated by the medical battalions of the engineers special brigades and it was to these stations that the Third Aux teams were attached. Their landing time would

be approximately H plus 4. The clearing stations would be set up just beyond the beach and they would function as all-purpose hospitals until the arrival of the field hospitals. It is to be noted that these beach clearing stations would precede the division clearing stations.

4. *The division clearing stations.* These would be landed later on D Day and would not function on the beach proper. They would follow the divisions inland.
5. *The field hospitals.* These would be landed late on D Day or on D plus 1. The field hospitals would relieve the beach clearing stations of some of their burdens. The teams would be shifted to the field hospitals as soon as possible.
6. *The evacuation hospitals.* These were to be landed on D plus 4 or D plus 5. As soon as they were set up, evacuation would revert to its normal pattern: casualties would be sorted at the division clearing station, non-transportables would be sent to the field hospitals, and transportables to the evacuation hospitals. By D plus 5 there would also be ashore Corps and Army medical battalions, medical supply dumps, and miscellaneous units.

An advance Third Aux Headquarters would be landed on D plus 1 or D plus 2. It would bring the specialist teams and twelve reserve teams from the Fourth Aux (six for each beach). Colonel Rogers and Colonel Crisler would be with this group.

### *The Airborne Elements*

The two airborne divisions had made the following arrangements.

The Medical Company of the 101st Air-

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

borne Division was to be landed in three echelons:

1. A glider-borne echelon at H minus 4.
2. A sea-borne echelon at H plus 3.
3. A second glider-borne echelon at H plus 12.

Major Crandall's team was part of the first glider echelon. These men would set up station in the Chateau Colombienne at Hiesville and do first-priority surgery from the start.

The Medical Company of the 82nd Airborne Division was to be landed in two echelons:

1. A glider-borne echelon at H plus 12.
2. A sea-borne echelon at D plus.

Major Whitsitt's team was with the glider echelon. As an after-thought the Commanding General of the Division decided that at least one Third Auxer should accompany the Division Staff in the assault wave at H minus 4. This was a suicide mission and Major Whitsitt assumed it himself. He knew that he would be without the equipment of the clearing station and he converted himself into a one-man field hospital. When it was time to emplane, he was covered from head to foot with a prodigious assortment of bags, packets, pouches, rolls, and bottles, weighing well over sixty pounds. The regular clearing station would set up in tents near Fauville, just south of Ste. Mère Eglise.

The selection of D Day was not a matter of chance. It was essential that it came during a period when the days were long for greatest air cover, when the moon was full for better night landings, and when the tides were strong for easier beaching. Originally, the day was fixed for 5 June. At the conference on the morning of 4 June the weather forecast was gloomy indeed. There were to be low clouds, high winds, and

choppy seas. Gun fire would be inaccurate, air support impractical, and boat landings risky. General Eisenhower decided to hold off. At half past three the next morning, another conference was held. Clouds were still low, winds were still high, and seas were still choppy but a further postponement would have put the entire invasion off several weeks. General Eisenhower delivered his classic order: "Let 'er rip."

The armada got under way. Hundreds of ships cast loose from their anchorage. Thousands of soldiers seized their weapons. Millions of people said their prayers. General Eisenhower spoke for them.

"Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped, and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

## NORMANDY

I have confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking!"

D Day is an indelible memory to all those who took part in it. In the short space of twelve hours, several hundred Third Auxers landed on the strongly fortified beaches. Some were able to go into action immediate-

ly and others were pinned down for days. Some were wounded seriously and others were only scratched. But all were heroes and the printed word cannot do them justice.

On D Day things were happening so fast in so many different places that it is difficult to follow them without an outline. The following table lists the elements of the Group approximately in the order of their arrival. It provides the framework for the story.

"You are about to embark on the Great Crusade."



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

<i>Team No.</i>	<i>Team Leader</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>How Carried</i>	<i>Time of Arrival</i>	<i>Place of Arrival</i>
19.	Whitsitt (minus team)	307th	Glider-borne	D Day	H-4½
20.	Crandall	326th	Glider-borne	D Day	H-3
19.	Rest of team	307th	Glider-borne	D Day	H+12
<b>UTAH BEACH</b>					
261ST MED BN, 1ST ENG SPEC BG					
1.	Boyden	Co "C"	LCI #513	D Day	H+4
6.	Zeiders	Co "C"	LCI #513	D Day	H+4
4.	Coffey	Co "A"	LCI #250	D Day	H+6
5.	King	Co "A"	LCI #250	D Day	H+6
2.	Brettel	Co "B"	LST	D+1	1700
3.	Wood	Co "B"	LST	D+1	1700
<b>OMAHA BEACH</b>					
61ST MED BN, 5TH ENG SPEC BG					
11.	Serbst	391st	"Empire Anvil"	D Day	H+5
8.	Peyton	391st	"Empire Anvil"	D Day	H+11
15.	Sutton	393rd	"Empire Anvil"	D Day	H+11
16.	Findlay	393rd	"Empire Anvil"	D Day	H+11
7.	Stoller	393rd	"Dorothea Dix"	D Day	H+7
9.	Meyers	393rd	"Dorothea Dix"	D Day	H+7
10.	Church	392nd	"Dorothea Dix"	D Day	H+7
12.	Higginbotham	392nd	"Dorothea Dix"	D Day	H+7
<b>OMAHA BEACH</b>					
60TH MED BN, 6TH ENG SPEC BG					
13.	Campbell	634th	LST #351	D+1	0800
14.	Reiter	634th	LST #351	D+1	0800
18.	Williams	634th	LST #351	D+1	0800
17.	Hurwitz	634th	LST #351	D+1	1000
	Lodmell, Crisler	Det "A"	"Naushon"	D+2	1000
	Haynes, Bang	Det "A"	"Naushon"	D+2	1000
	6 Fourth Aux teams	Det "A"	"Naushon"	D+2	1000
	Longacre, Matson	Det "B"	"Lady Connaught"	D+2	2300
	6 Fourth Aux teams	Det "B"	"Lady Connaught"	D+2	2300
21.	Partington		"Princess Maude"	D+4	1700
22.	Graves		"Princess Maude"	D+4	1700
23.	Williams		"Princess Maude"	D+4	1700
	Headquarters		"Empire Lance"	D+16	
24 & 25.	Maloney & Soderstrom		"Empire Lance"	D+16	
	Nurses		"Empire Lance"	D+16	
	Motor Train		"Ch. D. Poston"	D+22	

## N O R M A N D Y

The team roster for Normandy follows. When a man's rank is not stated, it is because this information was no longer obtainable at the time the roster was reconstructed. The original copy is lost.

TEAM No. 1: Major Allen M. Boyden, Capt Thomas J. Floyd, Capt Arthur F. Jones, Capt Gordon A. Dodds, T-4 Chester Houston, T-5 William F. Thomas, Pvt John J. Levy, T-5 William M. Rogers.

TEAM No. 2: Major Howard W. Brettell, Capt Ralph A. Dorner, Capt John A. Espo-sito, Capt Frederick Hadden, T-5 Charles A. Bonin, T-5 Edward M. Pawlowicz, T-5 James A. Bowman, T-4 Aurelio M. DeLeon.

TEAM No. 3: Major Frank Wood, Capt John A. Growdon, Capt Abraham Horvitz, Capt Maurice Schneider, T-4 Clarence C. Moody, T-4 J. D. Dillard, T-5 Melvin J. Cole, Pfc Aldor R. Romillard.

TEAM No. 4: Major Robert M. Coffey, Capt Sumner W. Brown, Capt William Sel-kin, Capt Norman Kornfield, T-5 Lloyd L. Kraus, T-5 William L. Jansa, Pfc John C. Fritzges, John T. Kelly.

TEAM No. 5: Major Walter W. King, Major Herbert S. Raines, Capt Nathan C. Plimpton, Capt Harold Gartner, T-4 Tommie H. Hicks, T-5 Carl W. Hamilton, T-5 Thomas J. Giaguzzi, Pfc Julius Polyniak.

TEAM No. 6: Major Glenn W. Zeiders, Capt Ivan Kempner, Capt Drake Pritchett, Capt Max H. Parrott, T-5 Asa Thomas, T-5 Wilmer Meidinger, Pvt Charles W. Castro, Pvt Anthony L. Lewandowski.

TEAM No. 7: Major Louis W. Stoller, Capt William R. Ferraro, Capt Elphege A. Beaudreault, Capt Jacob Bernstein, T-5 Wayne S. Balcom, T-5 Harry O. Andrews, T-4 Sam A. Rosenberg, T-4 Ralph T. Fritz.

TEAM No. 8: Major John B. Peyton, Capt Hollis H. Brainard, Capt Treadwell L. Ire-land, Capt Francis X. DiFabio, T-5 John L. Myers, T-5 Emery W. Hopkins, T-5 Thom-as A. Geurink, Pvt William Faskow.

TEAM No. 9: Major Douw S. Meyers, Major Duncan A. Cameron, Capt Myer M. Dashe, Capt Herman Brown, T-4 Lawrence E. Lemieux, T-5 Lionel J. E. Thibault, Pfc Nick Maravich, Pfc. Joseph Scuiletti, Jr.

TEAM No. 10: Major Reynold E. Church, Major John C. McClintock, Capt George A. Friedman, Capt Frank Merlo, T-4 Victor Nigro, Pfc Carl L. Heyd, Pvt Dewey Fee, Pvt Robert C. Emery.

TEAM No. 11: Major Charles A. Serbst, Major Evan Tansley, Capt Harry Fisher, Capt Eugene F. Galvin, T-4 James F. Mc-Donald, T-4 Joseph H. Patille, T-5 George F. Broerman, Pfc Franklin R. Fisher.

TEAM No. 12: Major James M. Higgin-botham, Major Marion E. Black, Capt Her-bert Marks, Capt Julius Hersh, T-5 Claris W. Dixon, T-5 Edward H. Fitzpatrick, T-5 Arville E. Shanholtzer, T-5 Jan Prys.

TEAM No. 13: Major Darrell A. Camp-bell, Capt John P. Sheldon, Capt Edwin G. Kirby, Capt Lester W. Netz, T-4 Thomas A. Owens, T-5 Donald J. Troy, T-5 Walter I. Nelson, T-5 Edward G. Gibson.

TEAM No. 14: Major Benjamin R. Reiter, Capt Stanley F. Smazal, Capt Rene A. Tor-rado, Capt Irving R. Hayman, T-4 Marion G. Mitcham, T-4 Svend W. Anderson, T-4 Wesley E. Robinson, Pfc Guy C. Peluso.

TEAM No. 15: Major Robert M. Sutton, Capt Anthony T. Privitera, Capt Warren C. Hastings, Capt Kenneth J. Chadwell, T-4 Nicholas Berkich, T-5 James C. Fish, T-5 David V. Pike, Pfc. Lawrence H. Janson.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

TEAM NO. 16: Major Francis M. Findlay, Capt Walter Twarog, Major Christopher Stahler, Jr., Capt Sidney Simons, T-4 Robert J. Smith, T-5 Claude W. Thomas, T-5 John M. Curran, T-5 Clarence C. Merkord.

TEAM NO. 17: Major Alfred Hurwitz, Capt Albert W. Brown, Capt Silas A. Coffin, Capt Anthony Noto, T-4 George G. Reedy, T-4 Marvin R. Wormington, T-5 James E. Battles, Pfc William Konikoff.

TEAM NO. 18: Major Horace G. Williams, Capt Joseph A. Sapienza, Major Chester K. Barta, Capt Joseph H. Hillman, T-4 Stuart J. Garcia, T-5 Jay W. Barker, Pvt Louis Turi, T-5 Limuel D. Walton.

TEAM NO. 19: Major James J. Whitsitt, Capt Michael M. Donovan, Capt Frank J. Lavieri, Capt Wentworth L. Osteen, T-5 Matt A. Rautiola, T-5 Daniel Overly, T-5 Harold J. Meinz, T-4 Lloyd Cooper.

TEAM NO. 20: Major Albert J. Crandall, Capt John S. Rodda, Capt Charles O. Van Gorder, Capt Saul Dworkin, T-4 Allen E. Ray, T-5 Emil K. Natalle, Pvt Francis J. Muska, T-5 Ernest E. Burgess.

TEAM NO. 21: Major Philip F. Partington, Major Sidney Chipman, Capt Ronald W. Adams, Capt Martin R. Mesick, Clifford R. Inman, James R. Netherland, James R. Feeney.

TEAM NO. 22: Major Clifford L. Graves, Major Wilson Weisel, Capt Claude M. Warren, Capt Philip Lief, T-4 Wilbur J. McNeely, T-5 Willie P. Jones, T-5 Joseph B. Heida, T-5 Sidney P. Lenox.

TEAM NO. 23: Major Mark H. Williams, Major Robert T. Stoner, Capt Joseph S. Tumiel, Capt Roy A. Geider, Pfc George G. Guido, T-5 Oneal Gross, T-4 Fred Reichers, T-4 Cyril Greene.

TEAM NO. 24: Major Paul K. Maloney, Capt William R. Ferraro, Capt Irving H. Rosenthal, Capt Louis Wolfe, T-4 Frank F. Jebsen, T-4 Wesley E. Robinson, T-4 Ray L. Kerns, T-5 Boyd W. Lehr.

TEAM NO. 25: Major Edwin M. Soderstrom, Capt Philip M. Winslow, Capt Rocco Tella, Capt Sidney A. Levine, Justice Hill, Harry Hummer, Troy Mitchell, William Lipka.

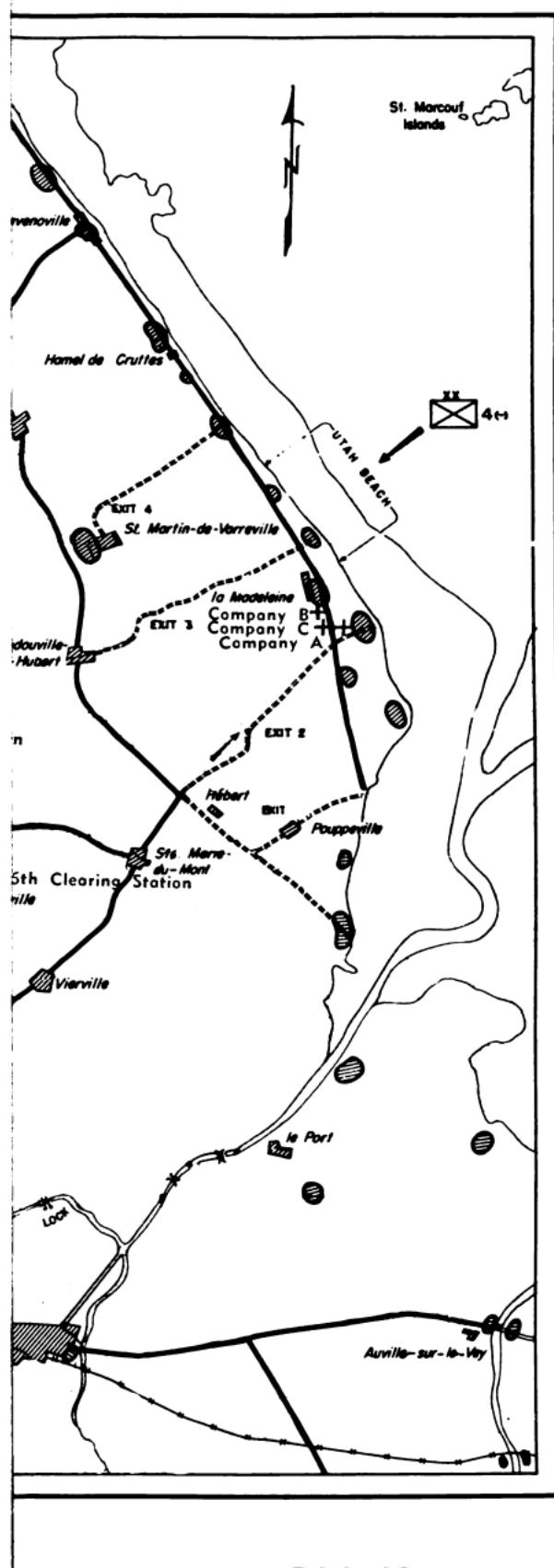
In addition, the Group had two neurosurgeons (Major Walter G. Haynes and Captain Donald D. Matson), two plastic surgeons (Major Jacob J. Longacre and Captain George A. Friedman), and two dental surgeons (Major J. Harvey Bang and Captain Benjamin G. Bauerle). These men worked partly as individuals, partly as teams.

### Major Whitsitt

It was the mission of the 82nd Airborne Division to seize Ste. Mere Eglise, to establish bridgeheads across the Merderet, and to exploit to the west. The first wave was made up of 6,500 troops which were partly dropped by parachute and partly landed by glider. A second wave of 2,200 men was scheduled for the evening of D Day. The first wave left England shortly after midnight. It circled wide around Cherbourg and approached Normandy from the west.

Whitsitt found himself in this first wave. He shared a glider with Colonel Eaton, who was the Chief of the Division Staff, and several aides. There was a partial overcast. Sometimes the men could see the waters of the English Channel down below, at other times they seemed to be completely lost in the clouds.

Whitsitt was on tenterhooks. "I'm an awful chump," he said to himself. "I should be at the base instead of out here with a tough bunch of leathernecks. Hell, if I get



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## N O R M A N D Y

in a scrape, I can't even defend myself. How did I ever get into this?"

He was not left long with his own recriminations. The clouds broke and Whitsitt could see land very plainly. Suddenly there was a clatter on the hull of the glider. It sounded like hail on a roof. "What's that?" said Whitsitt. Colonel Eaton pointed significantly to three jagged tears in the fabric. Flak!

Streaks of fire came up from the ground in graceful patterns. Whitsitt was fascinated. The little balls whizzed past and disappeared in space. They looked like fireworks but Whitsitt knew better. These were tracer bullets. He clenched his fists.

The glider was now down to five hundred feet. It broke formation. A town loomed in the darkness. Then all hell broke loose. The Germans were heavily entrenched at Ste. Mère Eglise and they had been warned of the approaching flight. Anti-aircraft

batteries opened up. Little balls of fire reached up from a dozen points. Down below, a road lined with trees stood out in the glow of shellbursts. There was the drop zone!

The green light flashed, the rope parted, the craft went into a rapid descent. Whitsitt braced himself. He kept his eyes fixed on the field ahead. They overshot. The glider hit a tree, spun around, and rammed its nose in the ground, spilling the men like matches out of a box. It was H minus 4½.

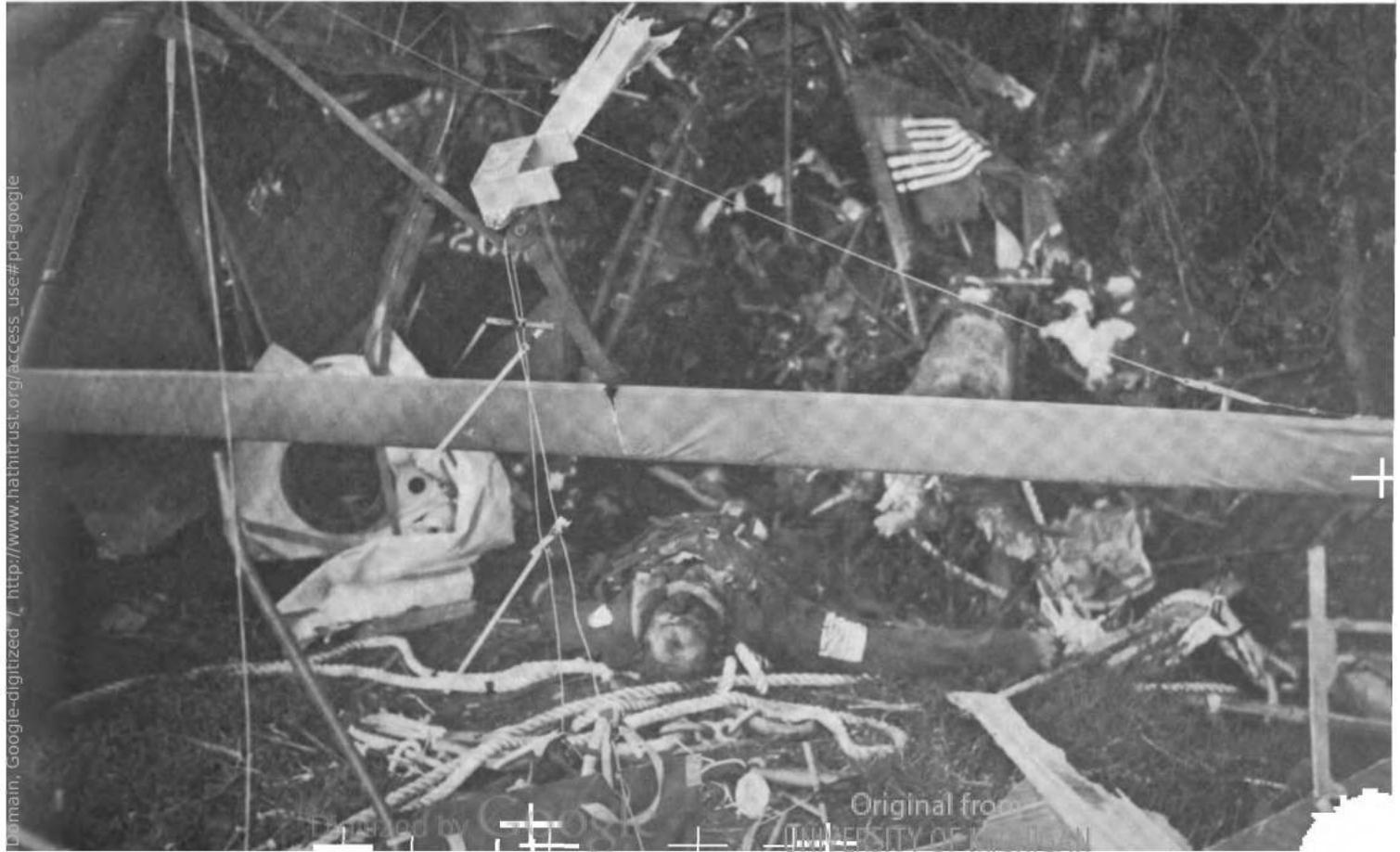
Whitsitt was stunned. He had been pitched thirty feet. Next to him was Colonel Eaton. Whitsitt crawled over.

"Are you hurt, Colonel?"

"I don't think so, but my knee sure hurts. I can't move it."

Whitsitt investigated the glider. The pilot had been killed and the rest of the occupants had scattered. Machine-gun fire raked the

The pilot of Whitsitt's glider was killed.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

field. Whitsitt ducked. In the darkness, there was little he could do.

All around, paratroopers engaged German patrols in hand-to-hand combat. The first man to give his position away was lost. Whitsitt crawled back to the colonel. A patrol advanced across the field. The figures were plainly distinguishable against the faint glow of approaching morning. They looked like Americans to Whitsitt. He wanted to signal them so that he could move the colonel to a safer spot. Then he heard a voice: "Donnerwetter! Wo sind denn die verdammt Amerikaner?" If it had not been for that casual remark, Whitsitt would have perished on the spot.

The hours seemed interminable. Colonel Eaton was in great pain. Whitsitt gave him morphine. Gradually light showed on the horizon. The glider seemed to be a total wreck. It made a target for a German mortar crew in the next field. Two shells came over. Hastily, Whitsitt dragged his casualty to a ditch. Silence settled once again.

Slowly dawn gave way to morning. Whitsitt lit a cigarette for the colonel. Then he saw something that made him rub his eyes and look again. A figure was coming down the road and a most unmilitary figure at that. It was a French boy leading a donkey cart! Just as if nothing had happened, this boy was on his daily chore of feeding the cattle or whatever he was wont to do at six o'clock in the morning. Whitsitt did not speculate. "Damn it," he said to Colonel Eaton. "If that boy can do it, we can." And with that, he raised up and motioned the boy to come forward.

"Bon matin, mon garçon. What about the cart?"

"Mon Dieu! Les Américains!" There followed a torrent of words.

Whitsitt cut the boy short. The situation called for action, not words. He lifted the colonel on the cart, took the donkey by the

reins, and mustered his best French: "Allons!" The little procession moved off.

They had barely gone a hundred yards when the Germans spotted them. Bullets hit the cart and the donkey. Whitsitt dived for the ditch. The boy started to run. He was cut down. Whitsitt gnashed his teeth. "I knew I should never have started this," he said to himself.

A German grenade landed at his feet. He picked it up and threw it back. His aim could not have been more perfect. The explosion killed two German soldiers and discouraged the others from further interference. Miraculously, Colonel Eaton on the cart escaped injury.

Whitsitt remained pinned down for several hours. As nearly as he could figure, there was a first-aid post in a house south of Turqueville. He realized that he could make no progress as long as he tried to transport the colonel at the same time. He helped the colonel to the ditch. "You better stay here, sir. I am going on a reconnaissance."

Whitsitt moved off. He had learned his lesson and he advanced cautiously. There were plenty of dead Germans in his path but no live ones and he reached Turqueville without mishap. A preliminary first-aid post had been set up. There were a dozen casualties, none of them serious. A dental officer was giving first aid. Whitsitt commanded a jeep and went in search of the colonel. He was lucky. Within half an hour, he was back.

On his return he found the aid post swamped. Turqueville was an island of American troops and there was sharp fighting. Quickly, Whitsitt went from room to room. Many of the casualties needed immediate attention. There was no time to be lost. He selected the kitchen as an operating theater. He improvised a table, boiled his instruments, ransacked the bedrooms for

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linen, and taught the dental officer to give ether. From then on he had no rest.

Towards nightfall small-arms fire came closer and closer. A paratrooper reported that the woods surrounding Turqueville were alive with Germans. So they were. This was a sizable body of troops that were retreating towards Ste. Mère Eglise. Trapped, they established themselves between Turqueville and Fauville in the very area where Whitsitt now found himself.

As yet there was no contact with the 4th Division. Everything depended on whether the paratroopers would stand their ground.

All night long the issue was in doubt. Whitsitt had no time to follow the battle at first hand but he received periodic reports while he was working at the operating table. A corporal assumed the job of special liaison agent. Triumphantly, this man would stick his head in the door and exclaim from time to time: "Major, we just got another one!" "Good," Whitsitt would say without stopping. The Germans were bucking a stone wall. In the morning their bodies littered the woods.

But the paratroopers suffered too and the facilities of the station were totally inade-



Lavieri, Donovan, Osteen, Whitsitt, shortly before take-off.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

quate. The 307th Medical Company landed in the evening. It too was quickly pinned down. For Whitsitt there was no relief until the next morning when 4th Division troops finally entered Turqueville. Their arrival relieved a desperate situation. The house was filled with casualties whose only chance of survival depended on a rapid evacuation to the beach. Colonel Eaton was one of the first men taken out. He shook hands with Whitsitt. "Major, if it were not for you, I'd be a dead duck."

Still not knowing anything about the rest of his team, Whitsitt proceeded to Hiesville as soon as the last casualty had left Turqueville. At Hiesville he found Crandall and his men up to their ears in work. Immediately, Whitsitt pitched in. It was not until the next day that he learned where his own clearing station was.

### *The Rest of Major Whitsitt's Team*

The body of the 307th Medical Company, together with the remainder of Major Whitsitt's team, emplaned in the evening of D Day. The men had been carefully briefed. Ste. Mère Eglise was in American hands. They were to land at Fauville, just south of Ste. Mère. Captain Lavieri listened attentively. This was his birthday and he relished the prospects. Had he known that Fauville was at this time still in German hands, he would have been considerably less enthusiastic.

The trip across the Channel was uneventful. The weather was clear and the view stretched for miles. It was a panorama such as no one had ever seen before, a panorama of thousands of ships lying off the Normandy coast. Then came the beach itself, followed by the inundated area. Lavieri was engrossed. Here he was flying over enemy territory on D Day and yet there was not

so much as a puff of smoke to show where the battle was. Ste. Mère was easily identifiable. The gliders started losing altitude. The next moment they were on their own.

Things happened fast. At an altitude of fifty feet Lavieri saw something that made him freeze. In the field directly ahead two Sherman tanks were burning fiercely! He turned to the pilot in a futile effort to point out the danger. The man was dead! Nothing could prevent the glider from settling on the tanks. It grazed a clump of trees, lost a wing, and came to rest directly on top of the tanks. It could not have been done more neatly. Flames enveloped the wooden structure. The men were trapped.

The Horsa glider is made of heavy plywood, so heavy that even a strong man cannot break it. Lavieri is not a strong man. He stands five foot four and weighs just under a hundred and ten pounds. At the time of his induction into the Army, he had had quite an argument with the examining physician. The physician wanted to reject him but Lavieri pointed out that he was an accomplished acrobat and had demonstrated his prowess on the spot. The examiner was impressed. "All right," he said. "We'll take you in. But be careful. Don't try any stunts."

Lavieri's stunt came on the evening of 6 June. The nearness of the flames gave him superhuman strength. He crouched low. Then he leaped like a battering ram. The hull gave way. He shouldered his way through. The others followed. It was not a moment too soon.

The Germans were strongly entrenched at this point. Where Lavieri landed they had several machine guns and an 88. The 88 had knocked out the tanks. Now the machine guns went into action. They were set up in a corner of the field, less than fifty yards away. How the eight men, led by Lavieri, ran the gauntlet will always be a

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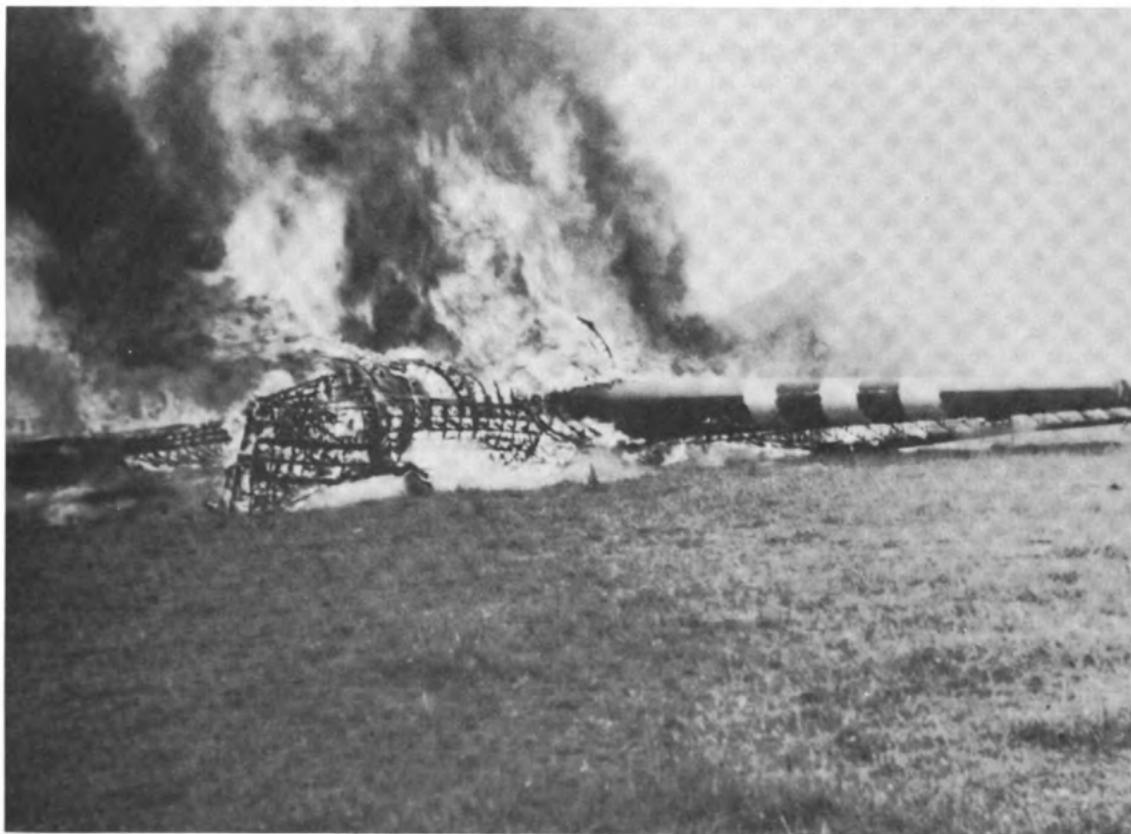
mystery. Only one of the eight was hit. The others reached a ditch, dazed, singed, and shaken.

Even in the ditch the danger was not over. As the glider was consumed by fire, a gas tank exploded and the flaming liquid showered the entire area. It was an ordeal by fire but Lavieri lived to tell the tale.

The other members of the team fared but little better. The area was not only honeycombed with enemy troops but also dotted with vicious stakes. Everywhere it was the same story. Gliders were impaled, torn asunder, set on fire. The survivors were pitched into individual fights for survival

rather than joined in coordinated action. The Medical Company especially fared badly. The commanding officer was killed. The men were driven to cover. The equipment was destroyed. At the end of D plus 1, half the personnel was still unaccounted for.

The pocket at Fauville was not cleaned out until the next day. Third Auxers spent the night in the ditch. On the morning of D plus 1 the men gradually converged on Fauville and set up their stations, in spite of the great handicaps. Tents went up at ten and by noon surgery got under way. Overland evacuation was not possible until the next day. At noon of D plus 2 Whitsitt finally found his way to Fauville. With the



Lavieri's glider goes up in flames.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

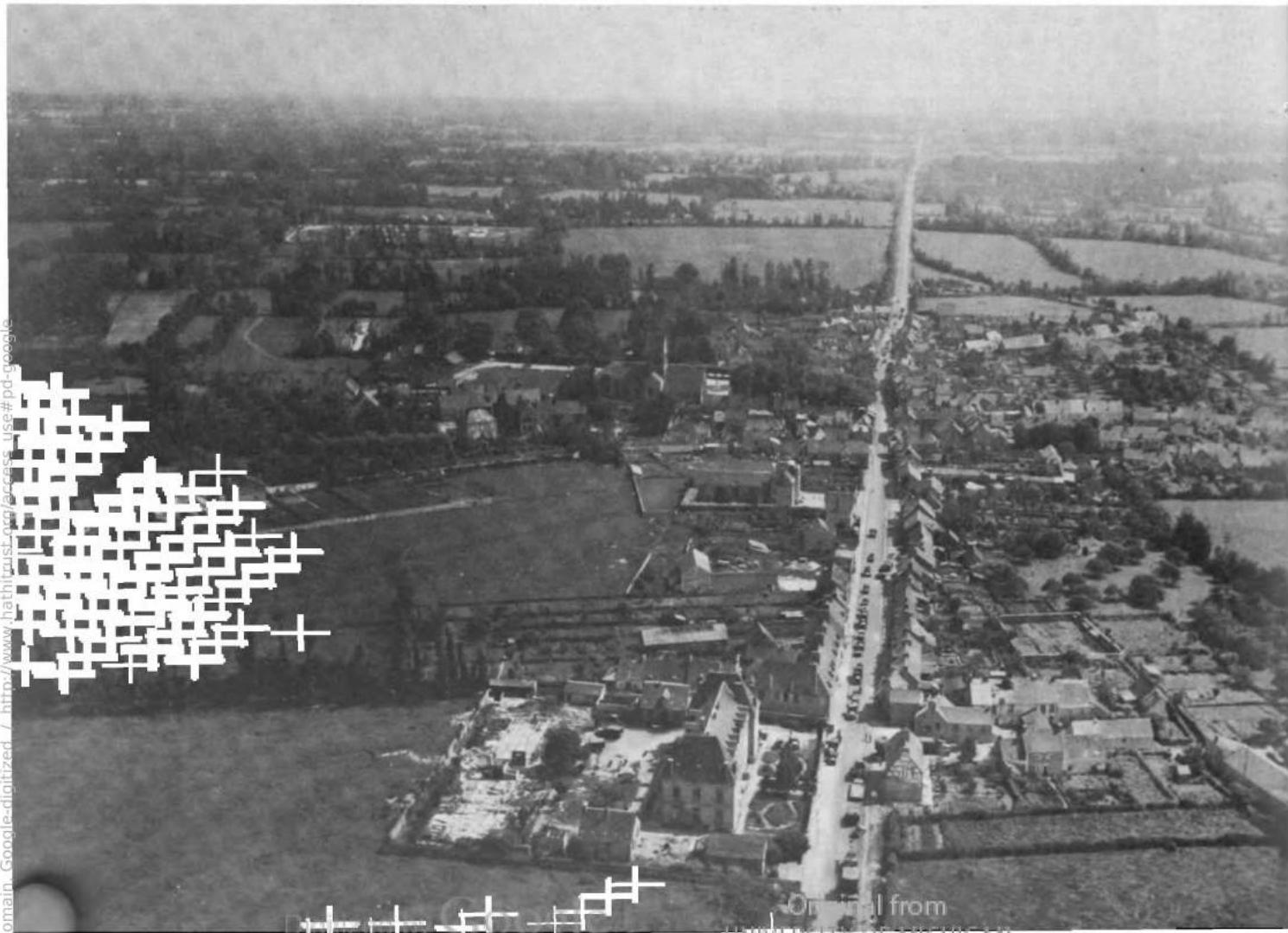
team thus complete, the operating room soon functioned at capacity.

The 82nd Airborne Division was only partly successful in its mission. The drop suffered badly from scattering, especially among the units along the Merderet. Here, pathfinders had not been able to mark the drop zones adequately because of heavy enemy interference. Many of the sticks came down in floodlands where the men were marooned for days. A bridgehead at La Fière was lost an hour after it had been gained. West of the river, the situation was extremely critical. The only thing that saved the many isolated groups was a signal lack of German aggressiveness. Rommel outsmarted himself.

On the other hand, the capture of Ste. Mère Eglise took place in a few hours. Paratroopers entered the town at H minus 3 and had the situation well in hand at H plus 3. The town was repeatedly counterattacked but the Americans never budged. Ste. Mère was the first town to fall into Allied hands.

Whitsitt's team remained with the 82nd Airborne for the rest of the Cherbourg campaign. At the end of thirty-six days, these Third Auxers were relieved of their assignment with the paratroopers and assumed their normal status in the field hospitals. They wrote a page in the history of airborne medical service and they richly deserve the admiration of their comrades.

Ste. Mère Eglise, the first town to fall into Allied hands.



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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

## N O R M A N D Y

### *Major Crandall's Team*

It was the mission of the 101st Airborne Division to seize the beach exits, to establish bridgeheads across the Douve, and to exploit to the south. The first wave was made up of 6,600 parachute and glider troops. Immediately following this wave a flight with 51 gliders took to the air. They carried command personnel, anti-tank weapons, part of the 326th Medical Company, and Major Crandall's team.

For Crandall this was a special day. His placid features and deliberate gestures hardly concealed his elation. From the very beginning it had been his ambition to participate in an aerial mission. And this was no ordinary mission. It was a giant airborne assault in which he was playing a vital part. For the first time in history, a complete surgical team was to be glider-landed in enemy territory. He was the surgical spearhead.

The members of the team spread themselves over five gliders. The take-off was

at H minus 5 hours. In Crandall's glider there was little talk. Everybody thought of what the next few hours would bring. After an hour and a half the steady roar of the towplanes was broken by the angry crescendo of a Nazi fighter. It passed directly overhead and disappeared as quickly as it had come. The towplanes scattered. The goal was in sight.

On the short flight from St. Sauveur le Vicomte to Ste. Mère Eglise the gliders ran through a heavy anti-aircraft barrage. Crandall tried to orient himself through the din. He had an exact mental picture of the country and he recognized the inundated areas without difficulty. Flak eased up. On went the warning light. This was it.

Another glider shot out of the darkness. It crossed not more than twenty yards away, sheared off a wing, and pancaked heavily. Forewarned, the pilot of Crandall's glider veered away. He skimmed over the trees, came in for a perfect landing, but was un-



Rodda survived the crash of his glider.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

able to stop before the next row of trees. The sound of splintering wood rent the air. Crandall felt as if he hit a brick wall. He bounced forward, crashed through the hull, and catapulted twenty feet. It was H minus 3.

When Crandall scrambled from the wreckage the first thing he noticed was the deathlike silence. No roar of engines, no bark of guns, no whistle of wind. Just silence, the silence of the night. Crandall reared himself. Was he the only survivor? A voice came from the middle of the field: "I'm hurt. Can anybody help me?"

Crandall turned. It was Lieutenant Colonel Murphy, the pilot of the glider that had preceded Crandall's. He was badly hurt and his passenger, Brigadier General Pratt, the Assistant Commander of the Division, was dead. The night started badly.

Crandall did what he could for Colonel Murphy and established an aid-station under the wing of the glider. Within a short time he heard that there were four more gliders in the same field, all of them with casualties. He organized a team of aid-men. In the middle of these activities he heard that the other members of his team had landed just two fields away. All had crash-landed and Rodda suffered several fractured ribs. But that was not enough to stop him. Within a short time everybody was busy.

"Major, I think this fellow has a broken back!"

"Put him here." Crandall bent over to examine the new casualty. Then he became aware of a sound that was later to become very familiar, the sound of an empty bottle tumbling through the air. It was a mortar shell. Everybody ducked. There was a dull thud, then silence. A paratrooper crawled over to investigate. "It's a dud. The Krauts don't even know how to set a fuse!"

Crandall realized that the Germans had a bead on them. It would be foolhardy to stay. He gave his orders quickly. All the

wounded to be carried to the ditch. Team to gather at the end of the field. No one to say a word. The men were getting their baptism of fire.

With the crack of dawn Crandall took his bearings. He was on the high ground east of the Carentan-Ste. Mère highway. Hiesville should be straight north. Leaving part of his team to care for the casualties, he organized a reconnaissance party. Cautiously the men advanced. Caution was not enough however. They ran into a German patrol. Soon every man was on his own.

As soon as the patrol moved off, Crandall continued. A dog barked. "Where there is a dog, there are people," Crandall said to himself. "I've got to find out where I am." He crossed a field and came to a farmhouse. The house was dark. Crandall knocked. To his great surprise his knock was answered almost immediately. A farmer, fully dressed, stood in the door.

"Entrez, mon capitaine. Votre ami est déjà ici."

There followed a long monologue from which Crandall gathered that another American was in the house. "Un blessé grave, mon capitaine!" A casualty! Instinctively, Crandall put his hand on his medical pouch. He followed the farmer to a back room. It was obviously the best room in the house. A fire was roaring in the fireplace and a bed had been pushed as close as possible to the comfortable source of heat. The casualty sat on this bed. His shoes were off and he had one foot in a bucket of steaming water. A good looking girl busied herself putting hot compresses on the American's slightly swollen ankle.

"Hallo sergeant. What's the matter?"

"Nothing much, Major. Just sprained an ankle."

"Can you walk?"

"Not very well, sir."

"I'll send a jeep for you as soon as I can."

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"Sir, if it's all the same to you, never mind the jeep. I'll be all right here. This isn't a bad spot." And the paratrooper nodded towards the girl.

Crandall turned to the farmer:

"Où est Hiesville?"

"Hiesville? Mais mon capitaine! C'est là-bas!" And the farmer broke into the French equivalent of "You can't miss it."

Crandall struck out. It was lighter now and he soon ran into members of the first battalion of the 506th Parachute Infantry who were on their way to Hiesville. There was no further interference. The village seemed to be undefended and Crandall selected five paratroopers to take possession of the Château Colombienne. The building stood off by itself, apparently deserted. Crandall led his party towards it.

A shot rang out. It came from the stable. One of the paratroopers slumped to the ground. The men scattered and brought the stable under fire. There was no answer. Two scouts edged forward while the others covered. They reached the courtyard and entered the house. Crandall awaited developments. While he lay in the ditch, another shot rang out and one of his bodyguards collapsed. The château might look peaceful but it certainly was not a healthy place.

A rifle team arrived. Bullets beat a pattern. Reinforcements came up. The house was sprayed. The two paratroopers who had entered found only a French family. There was no further fire. At 8:05 AM the building passed into American hands.

Crandall immediately started a preliminary inspection. The French occupants welcomed him with open arms but cautioned him that German snipers were in the vicinity. Crandall started assuring them that they need have no fear. In the midst of his conversation there was another shot and a man who had been standing in the courtyard wheeled and fell. This was going too far.

While Crandall finished his rounds of the house his paratroopers made a thorough search for the sniper but without success. In spite of all their efforts the courtyard came under intermittent fire during the four days it was in use. This situation was quite typical of the fighting in Normandy. Snipers were everywhere and it was extremely difficult to dislodge them. The man at the Château Colombienne was not silenced until a bomb laid the building in ruins.

Meanwhile the 326th Medical Company began to arrive and so did the other Third Auxers. Crandall set up an operating room in the milkhouse which had a concrete floor, large windows, and a pump with spring water. The living room was converted into a shock ward and the kitchen into a minor operating room. The courtyard became a reception station. There was no confusion. The medics improvised litters from window casings, feed troughs, kitchen tables, and sawed-off ladders. The Third Auxers fired the huge stove, boiled the instruments, arranged the tables, and prepared plaster. At H plus 3 Crandall selected the first case. It was Lieutenant Colonel Murphy. He survived and was the first casualty from the



The Château Colombienne, site of the first clearing station in Normandy. Picture taken following the bombing on 9 June.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

101st Airborne to return to the States. To Crandall's men goes the credit of performing the first surgery on the beachhead.

The 101st Airborne suffered badly from scattered drops, just as the 82nd had. This dispersion affected both personnel and equipment. Less than half the medical company reached Hiesville on D Day and less than ten per cent of the parachute bundles were recovered. Yet, the work went on full speed. The Division Surgeon with his party reached the site on the afternoon of D Day. Overland evacuation of casualties started on D plus 1. Crandall and his men never stopped.

When D Day ended, the 101st Airborne had accomplished the most important part of its mission: to seize the beach exits. Towards the south the position was more precarious. The causeways across the Douve had not been reached and the locks at La Barquette were held by little more than a skeleton force. The rapid overland progress of the 4th Division freed the 101st for its onslaught on this area. In a week of fierce fighting the 101st seized the causeways, advanced on Carentan, and effected a junction with the Omaha beachhead. Carentan fell on 12 June. The beachheads were joined on 14 June.

On the evening of D plus 3 the operating room at Hiesville was going full blast. There was heavy fighting on the causeways and ambulances were arriving incessantly. At eleven o'clock Crandall did a hurried triage. There were four casualties with abdominal wounds, three with chest wounds, and several dozen with wounds of the extremities. He quickly assessed the abdominal cases and selected the worst one. There had been no rest for three days and yet Crandall's hand was steady as he opened the abdomen. This was bad. Three holes in the stomach, one in the large intestine, and a lacerated kidney. Start with the kidney, was Crandall's thought. "Large clamp," he said, holding out his hand.

At this instant he paused. A roar of low-flying planes filled the air. They passed directly overhead. Then came the ominous whistle of bombs. The earth shook. The massive building shuddered. A heavy beam came down from the ceiling, carrying bricks and plaster with it. Lights went out, walls caved in, windows were blown to bits. Everybody in the operating room was knocked down. One entire wing of the building became a sixty-foot crater. The Nazi bombers had found their mark.



The bombs left a sixty-foot crater.

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Rescue work was virtually impossible. Scores of men were buried under debris, crushed by fallen masonry. Tons of cement settled down and smothered those who were pinned. Men who had talked lightheartedly a moment before were now moaning and praying for deliverance. The Third Auxers were badly shaken but otherwise unhurt. For hours they stumbled through the wreckage, trying to tell the living from the dead. Not until daybreak was it possible to make up the score. Of the station personnel, eight were killed and fourteen injured. Among the men who were being cared for at the time, the losses were even heavier. Hiesville was one of the worst catastrophes to befall a medical installation in the war.

The 326th Clearing Company was mauled but not defeated. The team remained at its post. On D plus 4 six officers and sixty-one enlisted men arrived from Corps Reserve. The 42nd Field Hospital loaned equipment. A new site was selected and within a few days the station was again in operation.

After the fall of Carentan the 101st Division went into action protecting the southern flank of the forces in the Cotentin and after the fall of Cherbourg it returned to England. There, Crandall and his men found orders directing them to return to the Third Aux in France. However, Major Taylor, the Commanding General of the Division, had other plans. He requested that the team stay. General Kenner gave the men their choice. Every member of the team elected to remain with the 101st. They became an integral part of the 326th Medical Company, shared in its glory in the Holland operation, and tasted defeat at Bastogne. Such were the men of the Third Aux.

### THE UTAH BEACH TEAMS

Task Force "U" sailed from nine different loading points in the Torquay area on the

evening before D Day. It was made up of 865 vessels in twelve separate convoys which were to rendezvous 22,500 yards off the beach. H Hour was 6:25 A.M.

Beach organization was in the hands of the 1st Engineers Special Brigade, veterans of Sicily. The beach clearing stations were to be established by the 261st Medical Battalion. This battalion was made up of three companies and each company was to set up its own station. The plan was for Companies "A" and "C" to land at H plus 4 near Exit 3. Company "B" was to follow the next day. Each company had two surgical teams attached:

#### Company "A"

TEAM 4 (Major Robert M. Coffey)

TEAM 5 (Major Walter W. King)

#### Company "B"

TEAM 2 (Major Howard W. Brettell)

TEAM 3 (Major Frank Wood)

#### Company "C"

TEAM 1 (Major Allen M. Boyden)

TEAM 6 (Major Glenn W. Zeiders)

Shortly before D Day Captain Parrott and T-5 Asa Thomas came down with malaria, a hang-over of their Sicily days. The men were utterly miserable but they were so keyed up that they insisted on staying with their team. They went ashore, two jumps



The dead.

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ahead of a disease that is notorious for its inroads on energy and morale.

At midnight a group of Third Auxers gathered at the railing of their LCI. The weather was cold and windy. Now and then the moon would come through. Ships were all around.

"It sure is dark," said Boyden to a boatswain. "I hope the Captain knows where he is going."

"Well, he's got plenty of buoys to guide him," was the answer. "Do you see them?" And the boatswain pointed to a line of red and green dots stretching faintly in the distance.

"Good work," said Boyden. "I hope they took care of the mines at the same time."

"Oh, sure," said the boatswain. "They have been at it for days. The main field is over there. Cardonnet Bank."

The lighthearted tone of the boatswain was a tonic. And why shouldn't he be lighthearted, was Boyden's reflection. All he has to do is put us off and go back home.

At H minus 3 the LCI's passed the marker vessel and entered the rendezvous area. Knowing that there would be at least a three-hour wait, the men settled down. Some paced the deck, some munched K rations, some made a last-minute check of their equipment, and some talked of family and home. At H minus 2 the assault troops debarked. The water was choppy and the small boats immediately began circling to avoid being swamped. There were commands and counter-commands, collisions and near-collisions, but on the whole the process was remarkably orderly. At H minus 1 the flotilla took off.

The engineers go aboard an LST.



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At H minus 40 minutes the Naval bombardment started. A force of one battleship, five cruisers, eight destroyers, and three subchasers plastered the area between Exit 1 and Exit 4. A few minutes later 276 Marauders laid their eggs. By this time the first waves were already approaching the beach. They carried the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 8th Infantry Regiment.

These battalions were supposed to land astride Exit 3 but they were deflected two thousand yards to the south and came in astride Exit 2. Several circumstances were responsible. In the first place, three of the four control vessels were disabled before they reached their destination. This left only one vessel to guide the assault waves. In the second place, a strong tidal current swept the buoys off course. In the third place, the tremendous Naval bombardment had

thrown up clouds of smoke and obscured the landmarks.

Potentially the error was serious, actually it was fortunate. The beach farther south was not only less heavily blocked but also more thinly manned. Directly astride Exit 2 were two machine gun emplacements. These were quickly overrun and the road now lay open. With Exit 2 cleared, the 1st Battalion moved up the beach to Exit 3 and the 2nd Battalion moved down to Exit 2. Thus the battle was developing according to schedule except that it took place considerably south of the projected area. Because resistance was light during the first few hours it was decided to exploit the existing situation. Markers were shifted. A 750-yard strip south of Exit 2 was marked Uncle Red and a similar strip to the north was marked Tare Green.

LCVP's take off. In the background, a cruiser.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

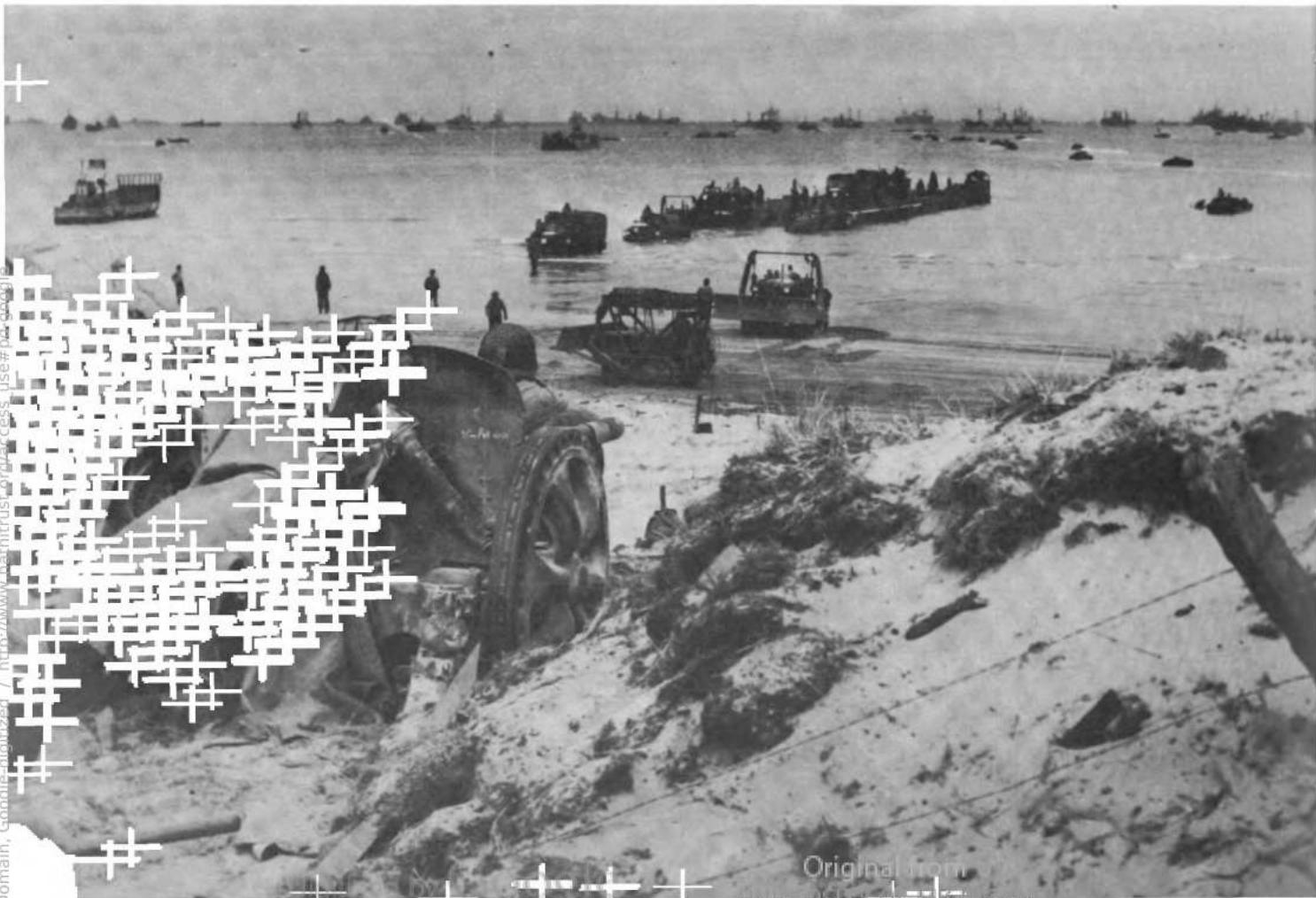
Beach clearing started promptly. By H plus 3 tankdozers had pushed the obstacles out of the way and bulldozers had beaten a wide path through the dunes. Company aid-men and members of the Naval medical sections had gathered up the few casualties and established two stations, one on Uncle Red and one on Tare Green. Some of the casualties had been loaded on craft returning to the Transport Area as early as H plus 2½. Ashore were also twenty-eight litter bearers of the 501st Medical Collecting Company. Such was the situation when the teams debarked from their LCI's into landing boats.

The first teams to beach were those of Boyden and Zeiders, the hour being approximately H plus 4.

"Well, we made it," was each man's first thought. "Now, where is all the excitement?"

There was very little excitement on the beach proper at this time. The 2nd Battalion had just met the enemy at Ste. Marie du Mont, about three miles inland. Sharp fighting took place there but the area was well out of earshot. The men had been briefed to follow the exit road for half a mile and set up station at the first crossroad. Dragging their equipment with them, they crossed a single row of dunes and looked out over a low-lying swamp bordered by a few desolate farmhouses. The road was narrow and devoid of shoulders. A disabled tank lay in a ditch. Ducks and trucks were inching past the tank. A shell kicked up a

Utah on D plus 6. In the foreground, a German 47 mm anti-tank gun, complete with potato masher.



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shower of mud near the cluster of houses of La Madeleine.

"Well, we are in the stream of history, boys," said Pritchett.

"Maybe, but what a place for history to flow through," said Zeiders. "Just give me Canton, Ohio."

The road intersection was not far. At this point the men turned north, following the edge of the swamp. Major Skinner, Commanding Officer of Company "C," was in the vanguard with the Third Auxers. He consulted his map.

"Here it is," he said. "This is where we are supposed to pitch our tents."

The men looked around. All they saw was a big sign saying ACHTUNG MINEN. Kempner knew what that meant.

"How about a place without a welcome sign?"

"The instructions are plain," said Skinner. "We stay here."

The personnel of Company "C" had brought their own mine detectors and they knew exactly how to use them. In England, when it was announced that the medics would have to de-mine their own stations there had been a wave of indignation. "What? Clean up those fields ourselves? Who do they think we are?" was the comment. But now the men could see the necessity of it. The engineers on the beach were much too busy. The medics went to work and the Third Auxers gave them a hand. They found over a hundred mines!

Casualties came in. The equipment of Company "C" had been packed on two duwks, two trucks, and six jeeps. The vehicles should have been deposited on the beach at the same time as the men. But there was no sign of them. Impatiently, Skinner looked at his watch. Each successive hour brought more casualties. Still no trucks. What was the matter?

There was a good reason. General Barton

of the 4th Division had closed Exit 2 to all vehicles except anti-tank guns and ammunition trucks. This exit was the only functioning outlet from the beach. It was narrow, exposed, and bordered by swamp land. A single hit by an enemy shell would have blocked it for hours. Hundreds of vehicles were accumulating on the beach but only one at a time could get off. In this emergency, tanks and anti-tank weapons had priority and the medical trucks had to wait.

"Captain, we've got a man here that's been hurt pretty bad."

Parrott looked up. "Where?"

"Right here, sir."

Parrott hurried over. It was a lieutenant with a deep neck wound. The bullet had fractured the voice box and the patient was slowly dying of asphyxiation. Parrott was desperate. Anxiously he scanned the road. "If I could just get my hands on an endotracheal tube!"

At that very moment a truck arrived at the intersection. It turned north. Parrott looked again. Yes, it was one of the medical trucks. He dashed down the road, guided the truck into the field, and began a frantic search for the tube. It was a race against time. Nobody knew exactly where to look. Each chest had to be opened and ransacked. Finally there was a cry: "Here it is!" Parrott seized the precious gadget. "Steady son," he said as he manipulated the tube down his patient's throat. Down went the tube, up came the secretions. Within a minute the patient's breathing became easier. Later that evening he was operated on and evacuated to the beach. This intubation was the first operation at the Utah beach clearing stations. Parrott considers it the high spot in his career.

Company "A" with the teams of Majors King and Coffey arrived on the beach at H plus 6 and set up a few hundred yards south of Company "C." There now took place a

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contest between the two companies to see who could get the operating tent functioning first. It was a draw. Third Auxers triaged their patients out in the open while the medics pitched the tents. They set a record. At H plus 11 the first casualty went on the table. Early surgery had become a reality.

Third Auxers will never forget that first night. Casualties piled up. The 4th Division, after a rapid advance early in the day, had come up against stiff opposition. Of the three regiments, none had reached its goal. The 12th was stopped at Beuzeville and the 22nd at St. Germain de Varreville. The 8th had established contact with the 101st Airborne at Pouppeville but it did not succeed in reaching the 82nd Airborne at Ste. Mère Eglise. A strong pocket of resistance remained south of the town and all efforts to liquidate it failed. It was this pocket that wrought havoc with the gliders that carried Team 19. The farthest penetration was at Les Forges, some six miles inland but here too the Germans were putting up a real bat-

tle. The beach clearing stations received casualties not only from the 4th Division but also from the airborne divisions. Triage became all-important.

At midnight there was an air raid. AA units let fly. The spectacle was fantastic. In the pitch-black night tracer bullets criss-crossed, rockets mushroomed, and star shells blossomed. At the height of the excitement German planes dropped magnesium flares and the entire scene assumed an eerie hue. Third Auxers stood spellbound until they heard a heavy object land at their feet.

"What was that?" said Selkin.

"A little present from our own gunners," said Brown.

The next morning they found it. It was a jagged piece of steel, the size of a fist. From then on Third Auxers showed more interest in their foxholes than in the anti-aircraft barrages.

The hardest job for the surgeons was not in the operating tent but in the pre-operative tent. Usually the triage officer had only



Clearing station on Utah. Picture taken on D plus 1.

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a few minutes to make up his mind. In those few minutes life was in the balance. In those few minutes the surgeon had to decide whether this casualty was doomed to die or had a chance to live. High priorities were for those who might live. Low priorities were for those whose surgery could be postponed and for those who were beyond help. But what if one's judgment failed? No human being is infallible. In civilian life a man can ponder and call a colleague. But here, there was no time. He was right or he was wrong and each time he was wrong, somebody paid with his life. It was a staggering responsibility.

There was tragedy and pathos. Through all the stark misery there shone the spark of faith and hope. A tank sergeant was brought in with a compound fracture of the thigh and severe burns. This man was in his turret when his tank was hit by an 88 at point-blank range. The shell pierced the turret and exploded inside, killing the entire crew except the sergeant. The tank caught fire and lethal fumes filled the confined space. Half suffocated and with his thigh bone broken in three places, this man nevertheless succeeded in hoisting himself to the top and letting himself down to the ground. He managed to crawl to a ditch but was showered with burning gasoline when the tank blew up. Bullets raked the ditch. But he kept his wits. He rolled in the wet grass till the flames were extinguished and he waited for help. It came too late. When this man was brought in a good many hours later there was only one thing to do: plenty of morphine and a few encouraging words. His last words were: "Captain, if my leg has to come off, will the Army buy me a new one?" *Quite a man, I was there.*

D plus 1 dawned cold and gray. The mess sergeant served black coffee and Third Auxiliaries stayed at their posts. Casualties continued to come in but help was on the way. At five o'clock in the afternoon Company "B" ar-

rived with the teams of Major Howard W. Brettell and Major Frank Wood. This company set up next to Company "C." The fresh teams relieved the others for a few hours but soon the backlog rose again and all hands were pressed into service.

There was bad news. The ship carrying the 42nd Field Hospital struck a mine and went down. The personnel was saved but the equipment was lost. The 45th Field Hospital did not arrive until D plus 4. Consequently the beach clearing stations handled all the wounded for the first four days. Three divisions channeled their casualties to the beach at a rate of a thousand per day! Only a small number were kept for surgery. The majority were shipped to England with nothing more than a dressing or a splint. Nevertheless, every casualty had to be triaged and the burden fell largely on the Third Aux teams.

The only help to arrive on D plus 1 was the Clearing Company of the 50th Medical Battalion. This company set up station at Le Grand Chemin but it could do little towards relieving the bottleneck on the beach because it had no facilities for major surgery.

D plus 1 saw heavy fighting on all sides of the expanding beachhead. The best progress was made towards the southwest; the slowest towards the northwest where the Germans had many prepared fortifications. Enemy batteries at Ozeville and Crisbecq shelled the beach incessantly. The 82nd Airborne on the west bank of the Merderet had hard going. Landings were behind schedule. Penetrations extended only for an average of six miles instead of the hoped-for fifteen. Worst of all, the Germans began to realize that Utah was the major effort. A strong counterattack at any point would have been disastrous.

D plus 2 brought little relief to the clearing station. The chief medical unit to come ashore was the Medical Battalion of the 4th

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Division. It set up station near St. Hébert. Some of the personnel of the 42nd Field Hospital also arrived, but without their equipment. Late in the day a special detachment of six Fourth Aux teams beached. They went to work at the clearing station on the morning of D plus 3. The same ship also brought two collecting companies, part of a medical depot company, and various advance parties of units yet to be landed.

Tactically, the center of gravity shifted south on D plus 2. General Eisenhower visited Omaha and ordered first-priority for the job of linking the two beachheads. This meant an immediate onslaught on Carentan, a task entrusted to the 101st Airborne.

On D plus 3 the medical situation continued virtually unchanged. There was still no field hospital in operation, although the 2nd Platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital was gathering rapidly at Le Grand Chemin. The beach clearing station with twelve surgical teams continued as the only installation for major surgery.

On D plus 2 the hard-pressed teams received a welcome reinforcement. Three more Third Aux teams arrived:

TEAM 21 (Major Philip F. Partington)

TEAM 22 (Major Clifford L. Graves)

TEAM 23 (Major Mark H. Williams)

Finally, the 42nd Field Hospital was able to open and it was joined shortly by a platoon of the 45th Field Hospital. In addition, the 128th Evacuation Hospital came in. It set up on D plus 5 at Boutteville and it was followed very soon by the 91st Evacuation Hospital.

Thus it was a full five days before the beach clearing stations were relieved of their burdens. Beginning with D plus 5, Third Aux teams were rapidly shifted to the field hospitals and by D plus 7, only one team was left on the beach. This was Major Zeider's who supervised the work of transshipping casualties to England until 28 June.

Summing up the initial week on Utah, it may be said that the seaborne landings had come off with surprising ease. It was only when the troops started inland that they met serious resistance. On Omaha Beach the situation was just the reverse. Here, the troops encountered fierce opposition on D Day but the later phase was less hectic. Omaha is an epic.

## THE OMAHA BEACH TEAMS

The teams earmarked for Omaha sailed with Force "O" from Weymouth Bay on 5 June. Force "O" consisted of 34,000 men on 298 transports, escorted by 33 minesweepers and 585 service vessels. The rendezvous point was 23,000 yards off the beach.

Omaha had been divided into two sub-sectors, east and west. The western sub-sector was to be assaulted by the 116th Regimental Combat Team, made up of 1st Division and 29th Division troops. Beach clearing was assigned to the 6th Engineers Special Brigade. The beach clearing station was to be operated by the 60th Medical Battalion which had one clearing company, the 634th. The station was to be established near Exit D-3, in the vicinity of les Moulins. The teams were as follows:

TEAM 13 (Major Darrell A. Campbell)

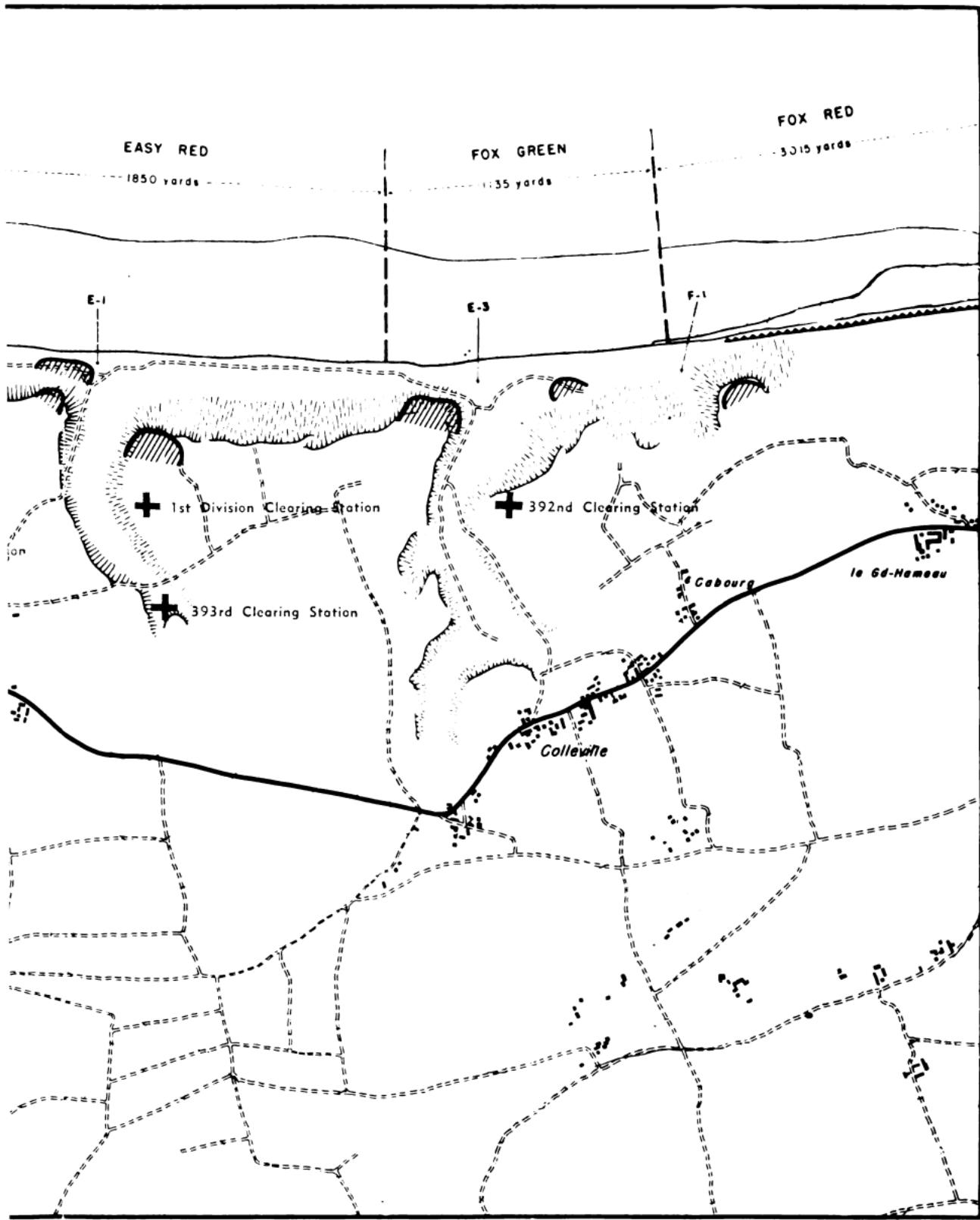
TEAM 14 (Major Benjamin R. Reiter)

TEAM 18 (Major Horace G. Williams)

TEAM 17 (Major Alfred Hurwitz)

The eastern subsector was to be assaulted by the 16th Regimental Combat Team. Beach clearing was assigned to the 5th Engineers Special Brigade. This brigade was serviced by the 61st Medical Battalion. The 61st Medical Battalion had three independent "collecting-clearing" companies, designated originally the 391st, the 392nd, and the 393rd. These numbers were later changed





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to "A," "B," and "C." Each company was made up of one collecting company and one clearing platoon and each company was to set up its own clearing station. The teams were as follows:

### Company "A"

TEAM 11 (Major Charles A. Serbst)

TEAM 8 (Major John B. Peyton)

### Company "B"

TEAM 12 (Major James M. Higginbotham)

TEAM 10 (Major Reynold E. Church)

### Company "C"

TEAM 7 (Major Louis W. Stoller)

TEAM 9 (Major Douw S. Meyers)

TEAM 15 (Major Robert M. Sutton)

TEAM 16 (Major Francis M. Findlay)

The twelve teams arrived at the rendezvous point on three separate transports. The teams of Serbst, Peyton, Sutton, and Findlay were on the "Empire Anvil." The teams of Stoller, Meyers, Church, and Higginbotham were on the "Dorothea Dix." The teams of Campbell, Reiter, Williams, and Hurwitz were on LST 351.

The battle on Omaha Beach will always rank as the shining example of American fighting spirit. It is a story that can be told here only in terms of what Third Auxers saw and did. Although the events took place on a beach where under ordinary circumstances the entire action would be in plain sight, the fierce German resistance cut the area into multiple segments where every man was on his own. The story starts with Serbst's team which beached at H plus 5.

### *Major Serbst's Team*

The SS "Empire Anvil" entered the rendezvous area at H minus 3, all hands on deck. Besides the teams of Serbst, Findlay, Peyton, and Sutton, it carried Company "A" of the 61st Medical Battalion and components of the 16th Regimental Combat Team. A wind

of fifteen knots whipped up a heavy swell and capped the long rollers with white foam.

"Well, at least we'll be wafted ashore," said Peyton who could see the lighter side of any situation, no matter how grim.

"That'll suit me," was Sutton's reply. "I've had enough of this boat already." And he pointed with obvious annoyance at a big gash on his forehead where he had been cut by the sharp steel of a porthole.

"Just wait till you get on that beach and you'll wish you were back here," countered Peyton.

"Anything is better than this miserable ship. I'll take a foxhole."

"Look, they're beginning to take off."

The first LCVP's were being swung overboard. The "Empire Anvil" carried thirty-three of these and the process of lowering them down to the sea took almost an hour. Each boat held approximately thirty men. At H minus 1 they took off, destination Easy Red. It was a journey from which many never returned.

Low hanging clouds obscured the field of vision and a raw wind made Third Auxers shiver. They congregated in the bow and peered in the direction of the shore. Only the distant rumble of the Naval bombardment told them that the battle had been joined. "It's just like Slapton Sands, isn't it?" said Serbst.

The first wave of LCVP's was due back at the "Empire Anvil" at H plus 2. The plan was to send the teams next. However, no LCVP's showed up. Out of the 200 craft used in the first wave less than a dozen were able to return to their mother ships. Some lost their bearings, some were hailed by other vessels, but most were wrecked. The gun positions on Omaha Beach had opened up with a withering fire.

At H plus 3, a lone LCVP hove to. Slowly and laboriously the wallowing vessel worked its way alongside.

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"Look," said Tansley. "See that dent in the ramp? He must have been hit. The damn thing is half full of water."

The LCVP was attached to a boom and the crew members clambered out. They were both wounded and badly shaken. Their story was of one calamity after another. Their boat had been hit. The beach was a shambles. The battalion medical sections had been wiped out. The engineers had been unable to land. The men ashore were being mowed down. It was a picture of dire confusion and distress.

The commanding officer of Company "A" held a conference with Major Serbst. Obviously, there was no room for the entire company in the battered LCVP. The most that could be done was to fill the boat to capacity and hope that it would remain

afloat for one more trip. A call went out for volunteers. The response was overwhelming. Not a man wanted to be left out. The commanding officer picked twenty-three of his own men and the team of Major Serbst. These men boarded the boat within a few minutes.

But who was to act as steersman for the craft? Nobody had thought of that. A Navy chief stepped forward. Leveling a finger at his most expendable man, he thundered:

"Hey, you! Get in that boat. And make it snappy. What do you think Uncle Sam is paying you for?"

The poor fellow was so amazed at the command that he forgot to answer the question. Take that LCVP to shore? Why, he had never manned anything heavier than a

Omaha Beach, looking west. Third Auxers landed where beach curves to the right.



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canoe! But the chief was in no mood to argue. The sailor buttoned up his coat, put on his gloves, and slid down into the half-flooded assault boat. In his consternation, he slipped and splashed water in all directions.

"Come on, fellow," said Serbst. "It isn't as bad as all that. All you have to do is take us to Easy Red. Let's get going."

The coxswain took up his position. The engine kicked over. The boat raised its head out of the water. They were off!

Trouble began from the start. Long rollers bore down on the damaged craft. Spray filled the air. The pump was flooded. Water rose rapidly in the bottom. Several of the men became violently ill. Serbst took a grip on himself.

"Fellows, we've got to bail this box if we want to keep her afloat. Use that bucket. Use your helmet. Let's get rid of this water or we'll drown like rats." He dipped his own helmet and pitched its contents overboard. Never was an order obeyed with more alacrity.

Halfway towards shore, Serbst peered out. It seemed to him that the trip was taking much longer than necessary, even in this leaky tub.

"Say, fellow, do you know where you are going?" he asked of the coxswain.

"Yes sir," came the answer, unconvincingly.

"Where?" insisted Serbst.

The coxswain pointed ahead. All Serbst could see was a low-lying headland about three miles way. There were no signs of battle. The sea too was suspiciously quiet. Except for a destroyer in the distance, there wasn't another craft in sight.

"Hey, what's that?" said Tansley, pointing to a large metal object floating in the water.

"Looks like a mine," said Fisher.

"Mine? We're supposed to be in a swept channel aren't we?" said Galvin in pained surprise.

"Well, if we are, we certainly have it to ourselves," said Serbst. "What's the score anyway? Are we spearheading this invasion?"

There was a moment of silence. Then . . . whoosh! The unmistakable sound of a shell. Startled, the men looked seaward. The same destroyer that had been circling idly in the distance a moment ago now bore down on them like a charging monster, smokestacks belching, guns blazing.

"Look out!" shouted Serbst. "He'll run us down."

He might as well have saved his breath. For all one could tell, the captain of the destroyer had drawn a bead on the Third Auxers. Closer and closer came the mountain of steel. At fifty fathoms it went into a sharp turn and let go with a broadside. There was a blinding flash, a deafening roar, and a small tidal wave. The LCVP rocked violently.

"Where the hell do they think they're going?" said Serbst after he had recovered from the shock. "That looked like a British destroyer to me. Have we joined the limeys or has the American Navy been sunk?"

He had hardly finished speaking when there was a flash of fire from the shore. Seconds later, a small geyser appeared on the destroyer's starboard side. Then the truth bore in: This destroyer was fighting it out with a shore battery! The LCVP had drifted into the British sector. No wonder they had seen no sign of the control ships. No wonder they had gone through a mine field. No wonder they were drawn into a battle royal. They were heading straight for Arromanches!

Serbst turned disgustedly to the would-be navigator: "We're off course. Get back

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where we started from. We're lucky if we make it."

The LCVP made a big half-circle. Back it went, heading into the swell, shipping more water with every wave. It was a painfully slow journey, made more so because of its utter futility. Presently one of the engines gave out. Harassed by mines and weighed down with tons of water, the LCVP limped back to the "Empire Anvil." It was in such precarious condition that it sank within a few minutes after the men had left her. For Team 11, Operation OVERLORD had started with a near-disaster.

The "Empire Anvil" was still without word of its LCVP's but an LCT had drawn alongside and there was an animated conversation between the two ships. Could the LCT take on the shipwrecked passengers? It was an unnecessary question because the master of the LST outranked the master of the LCT. As quickly as they could, Serbst's men transferred to the larger vessel. Wet, cold, and seasick, they hoped only for an early landing. Little did they realize what that meant.

The most precious cargo aboard the LCT was a bulldozer. This became evident to all as soon they entered the assembly area, two miles off-shore. Here, a number of boats were plying the water, while the signal officer on the regulating ship was trying to get clearance for them. According to the schedule, Easy Red should have been ready for heavy equipment. Actually, all the beach exits were covered by enemy fire. Bulldozers might be able to clear a path up to the exits. The man with the megaphone on the regulating ship caught sight of the LCT.

"LCT, LCT," he shouted. "Are you ready?"

"Roger."

"Get going. Shoot for Easy Red."

From the regulating ship to the shore was about ten minutes, the longest ten minutes

these men had known. In the surf the LCT slowed down. It was a sitting duck. Excitement was at fever pitch. Shells bracketed the ship. The German gunners zeroed in. Everyone knew that the next shell would find its mark. The ship scraped bottom. The ramp came down. The men surged forward.

Nobody will ever know why the German gunners hesitated. Perhaps they were making a last-minute correction for wind drift. Perhaps they were waiting for a better target. Perhaps they were playing a game of cat and mouse. At any rate, they held their fire for a few seconds and in those few seconds, everybody who could walk was over the ramp. Then the bulldozer came forward. It just stood there defiantly. A moment later it was a mass of twisted wreckage. Ironically, the LCT delivered its entire cargo except the one item that was really wanted.

Team 11 stumbled ashore. The first impression was one of utter devastation. The beach was littered with wreckage and strewn with dead and wounded. In the distance, a soldier was trying to pull a wounded comrade out of the surf. Where were the markers, the litter bearers, the collecting points? In fact, where was everybody? The men looked at each other in consternation. Something was dead wrong.

Something *was* dead wrong. What had happened? The true story did not come to light until much later.

In the first place, the pre-assault bombardment had gone awry. When the Liberators arrived over the beach, the overcast made direct observation impossible. Pathfinders laid out the drop zone but, for fear of hitting the assault boats which were then already approaching, they laid it too far inland. The bombs dropped in rear areas and the beach escaped.

In the second place, the DD tanks came to grief. These were the swimming tanks

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that were supposed to give covering fire for the infantry. The rough water played havoc with them. In the eastern subsector, only five tanks made the beach and of those five, three were disabled in the first few minutes. In the western subsector, the tanks did not even take off. In the absence of these valuable weapons the infantrymen were fighting the shore batteries practically bare-handed.

In the third place, the strong current carried many LCVP's off their target. Landings were made too far to the east. Sometimes the error was as much as a thousand yards. One company of the 116th, which was destined for Easy Green, came in at Fox Green, two miles off target! More often the error was only a few hundred yards but even a few hundred yards was enough to isolate a unit on a beach that was under withering fire. An engineer unit with panels for marking Dog Red landed on Easy Red, a mile away. They set up their panels anyway. At H plus 2 an officer on Dog White saw two engineers dragging a heavy box of explosives along the open beach. As they stopped to rest, one of them wiped the sweat off his face: "Where are we? We are supposed to blow something up down toward Vierville." Vierville was a mile away!

In the fourth place, the Army-Navy Special Engineer Task Force suffered crippling losses. These were the demolition teams that were supposed to blow gaps through the underwater obstacles. Of the sixteen teams, only five hit their sector on the nose and eight reached shore anywhere from ten to thirty minutes late. All buoys and poles for marking lanes were lost. Loaded with explosives, whole parties were often wiped out by a single shell. Some of the teams did manage to fix their charges but too late to set them off before the assault infantry started passing through. In spite of these dire difficulties, the engineers blew a number of gaps, over half of them on Easy Red.

Later in the day Easy Red became a graveyard for hundreds of vehicles that were channeled there because other sectors were still blocked.

The assault troops that landed on H Hour faced an insurmountable task. Instead of being able to cross the beach and scale the bluffs all in one breath, these men came under heavy fire as soon as they left their boats and they had very little to fight back with. Between H plus 1 and H plus 1½, the initial assault force stumbled, crawled, and fought its way across the beach to the sea wall but the units lost half their men, became badly intermingled, and were often left without their commanding officers. The men dug in along the sea wall. The Germans in their trenches were just a few hundred yards away. Now began the advance against these trenches, an advance that spelled certain doom for the first men to try it. Everywhere it was the same: Men would jump across, set their charges, and crumple under a volley of machine gun bullets. It was only because of their magnificent disregard for their own lives that the Americans were able to carry the attack to the enemy.

Between H plus 2 and H plus 4, the assault forces scaled the bluffs in four different areas: Dog White, Easy Green, Easy Red, and Fox Green. They scaled the bluffs rather than advance through the natural beach exits because these exits were flanked by German guns. The bluffs on the other hand had vegetation which gave a man some cover. Smoke from brush fires helped to provide concealment. The men who made it to the top immediately deployed themselves against the known strong points on the outskirts of Vierville, St. Laurent, and Colleville. They bypassed the gun emplacements on the bluffs. At H plus 5 when Serbst's team landed, these penetrations were well under way but only two of the thirty gun emplacements covering the beach had been knocked out.

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The losses inflicted on the assault infantry were also felt in the Naval beach medical sections and the battalion medical sections. Under the murderous fire from the bluffs these men had been unable to start any organized collection of casualties. Sections were scattered, equipment was lost, leadership was gone. Here and there the Third Auxers could see mute evidence that the medics had suffered heavily. The lone soldier who was tugging at a casualty in the surf represented the sum total of medical effectiveness on Easy Green at H plus 5. His efforts were pitifully inadequate in the face of the hundreds of wounded who were crying for help.

Serbst called his men together.

"Fellows, we are supposed to go somewhere up there . . . ." And he pointed vaguely to the bluff which was just then coming under renewed attack. "If anybody wants to fight it out with an 88, go to it. If you want to dig a hole right here, go to it. But I am going to see if I can help a few of these poor bastards." And with that he started towards a group of wounded.

The effect of this courageous action was instantaneous. Within seconds the Third Auxers had deployed themselves. There was not much to work with, but at least they had morphine in their bags and water in their canteens. The LCVP's had brought medical pouches which contained such priceless things as plasma, splints, bandages, and dressings. Aided by the men of the 391st, the team members recovered these pouches. They chose the shelter of a wrecked bulldozer as a collecting point. They dressed the worst wounds, splinted the worst fractures, and eased the last hours of those who were beyond help. It was a beginning.

Easy Green and Easy Red became targets for a devastating barrage shortly after the Third Auxers landed. These two sectors were the first to be opened for vehicles because

here the beach obstacles had been cleared. Also, Easy Red was the first sector to have a beach exit. Consequently, beach masters began to direct incoming boats to these sectors. The Germans could not have wished for a better opportunity. They opened up on each boatload as it came ashore and their aim was excellent. No wonder. They had practiced for years!

To be caught in an artillery barrage without cover and without the prospect of finding cover is probably the worst punishment a soldier can get. There is no salvation, no mercy, no escape. Life hangs by a thin thread. A man says his prayers and does his work. He has to have blind courage and blind faith. Any second may be his last.

Each man carries his own memories of those fateful hours. Tansley remembers most vividly the driver of a bulldozer. For hours the engineers had been trying to beat a path up the bluff. Without this path no tanks could advance and without tanks the infantrymen were at the mercy of the German batteries. Time and again, dozers came ashore, only to be immediately demolished by the point-blank fire of the emplacements.

Finally a single dozer managed to cross the beach and reach the point where the road was to start. Shells came over. The driver paid them no heed. With phenomenal dexterity he manipulated his dreadnaught across the shingle and towards the bluff. Back he came, always two jumps ahead of the next explosion. Now this way. Then that way. Here was a dozer that outran the mines and outmaneuvered the 88's. It was unbelievable.

Tansley had a good look at the man. He was very young, probably in his early twenties, but he gripped his lever with the grim determination of a veteran. He had no eyes for the destruction around him, no eyes for the rain of shells, no eyes for anything except the job at hand. Here was a man who

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stuck by his guns, come hell or high water. Tansley stood transfixed.

This game could not last forever. It came to an end on the last lap. A shell scored a direct hit and the driver was hurled to the ground, mortally wounded. Nobody will ever know the name of the man who gave his life for the path up the bluff on Easy Red. But perhaps the name is unimportant. It was the deed. That deed will live as a symbol of the kind of courage that carried the day. Tansley wiped the sweat off his brow. He had come close himself.

Third Auxers could not expect to stay out of trouble for long on this beach where their every movement could be observed not only by the artillerymen but also by the machine gunners, a bare five hundred yards away. The first victim was T-4 Patelli. Patelli and Tansley were busying themselves with a group of wounded in a shell hole. A truck with explosives was slowly making its way towards the bluff. A mine went off and the truck began erupting ammunition. Tansley and Patelli ducked. When the danger seemed over, they lifted their heads. No sooner had they done so than a second series of explosions took place. Again they fell flat but this time too late. Patelli was hit in the thigh and Tansley was burned.

"I'm afraid that this means the end of the trail for me, Major," said Patelli as Tansley examined the wound.

"Don't worry," was the answer. "We'll have you in the Victory Parade yet."

There was no Victory Parade for the Third Aux but Patelli marched home more proudly than he would have done in the most spectacular military review.

Team 11 was actually working in the wrong sector. Easy Green was supposed to be in the territory of the 60th Medical Battalion, but the only elements of this battalion ashore were a small reconnaissance party farther to the west. This party was

completely immobilized and worked without any contact with the Third Auxers. These two independent groups were the only second-echelon medical personnel on the beach until H plus 7 when the teams from the "Dorothea Dix" landed.

The next medical shipment to come to the beach was a small group of the 61st Medical Battalion. They too were immediately pinned down so that Third Auxers never saw them. It was just as well. If Serbst had known that these men were from the Headquarters Detachment, he would have blown his top. Such was the turmoil that typewriters arrived before surgical supplies!

While this was going on Serbst started looking for a place to take his wounded. In his travels up and down that shell-pocked beach he came across the anti-tank ditch on Easy Green. It was located about half-way between high-water mark and the bluff and it offered at least some protection against grazing fire. The bottom was partly inundated and the approaches were still mined but it was better than no cover at all. Banding together with the surviving members of the beach medical sections and the battalion medical sections, the Third Auxers now started moving their wounded to this spot. Members of the 634th Clearing Company helped. In the early afternoon litter bearers of the 500th Collecting Company arrived and still later came elements of the 1st Division Clearing Station. Everybody assumed the same risks, everybody braved the same hazards, everybody worked until he dropped with exhaustion. Thus, the first aid-station on Omaha got under way.

To relieve suffering under such conditions was a real task. Most of the casualties were in profound shock, as much from exposure as from their wounds. All that was available was shelter, dressings, and morphine. How to provide warmth and nourishment? Galvin had a bright idea. He remembered that every

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soldier had been supplied with a self-heating can of soup. These cans were life-savers. It was the only warm food on the beach for days.

The first truck with medical equipment to arrive was one belonging to the collecting station of the 1st Division. It was loaded with tents and litters but it also had a goodly supply of first-aid items. Serbst immediately sent a runner to direct the vehicle towards the ditch. The supplies were a godsend because by this time over two hundred wounded had been gathered up and Third Auxers were beginning to feel the pinch. Sometimes it was possible to place a few of the casualties aboard returning ducks. The vast majority

however had to be held until they could be evacuated seaward under cover of darkness.

At H plus 10 the commanding officer of the 60th Medical Battalion landed. He made his way to the ditch, talked to Serbst, and returned to the water line to gather up the rest of his men. It was his last act. A shell struck him down only a few minutes later and Colonel Bullock died that same night. He was the man the battalion could least afford to lose.

Serbst and his men stayed in the anti-tank ditch until noon of D plus 1. During this time they helped in the treatment and evacuation of over four hundred casualties, among them four Third Auxers. To see who

Easy Green on D plus 5. Tank ditch in the right foreground.



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these Third Auxers were, we must return to the Transport Area fifteen miles offshore.

### *The teams of Majors Stoller, Meyers, Church, and Higginbotham*

These teams made the Channel passage on the SS Dorothea Dix, together with part of the 391st and 393rd Collecting-Clearing Companies. They arrived in the Transport Area, waited out their turn, and boarded an LCT at H plus 6. When they arrived at the control vessel, they learned that the first beach exit had just been opened and that they were to land forthwith on Easy Red. Major Meyers was the senior officer.

"That doesn't look good to me," said Meyers when the LCT was about a quarter of a mile from the beach. "Do you see that pile-up down there?" And he pointed ahead where a number of boats had come to grief on under-water obstacles.

"Those obstacles are the least of our worries," said an ensign standing next to Meyers. "It's those 88's. Do you see how they hold their fire until a boat is almost ready to land? That's when they have you at their mercy."

Meyers swallowed hard. A landing in the face of enemy guns? That was even worse than he had suspected. At two hundred yards the craft was bracketed. Almost at the same time, a boat just ahead struck a mine and settled directly athwart the LCT. A collision seemed inevitable. At the last moment the LCT swung to starboard and a moment later it touched ground. The men jumped. They had no thought except to get to that beach. They waded in. When they looked back, they saw that their LCT had been hit and was making frantic efforts to return to sea. It was later demolished by a mine.

Easy Red at H plus 7 was a shambles. Third Auxers saw a beach that had been swept at regular intervals by fire from the strong points flanking the E-1 draw. The



Ferraro, Beaudreault, and Bernstein dig in at the water's edge. This is Easy Red.

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results were painfully apparent. There was not a soul to be seen. Shell holes were everywhere. Orientation was impossible. Even the personnel of the clearing companies had vanished. It was as if an evil hand had struck this area and taken every vestige of human life with it.

Major Stoller scanned the sands. Directly in front of him he saw a shiny button. It looked too regular for a natural shell. He bent over for a closer look. A mine! "Get back," he warned. "We don't want to get blown up just yet."

A shell struck the beach and the concussion blew Captain Beaudreault down. Uninjured, he scrambled to his feet. "Let's get out of here. We can't do any worse than this."

The men struck out in a westerly direction, close to the water line. They practically passed in review of the gun emplacement on the E-1 draw. Had they known that this emplacement was full of German gunners, they would have sneaked off in the opposite direction. But they were completely unaware of their predicament and they came within an ace of choosing this very draw to get off the beach!

The beach master on Easy Red decided that his sector could handle vehicles. A bulldozer had gotten through to the top of the bluff. Easy Red became a gathering point for the first large shipment of trucks and other rolling stock. The result was that the Germans laid the fiercest barrage of the day on this point. Firing mostly at distances of

The shingle was rough on vehicles.



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teams could have made excellent forward artillery observers.

Without tools, Third Auxers were unable to dig in very far. The position of these men was such that it afforded them an unobstructed view of the beach and they followed the battle with emotions that rose or fell as the incoming troops either swept to the dune line or scattered in the face of the withering fire. They witnessed the arrival of the first artillery at H plus 8 (six half-drowned howitzers that fired a few ineffective rounds) and they watched the efforts of the engineers to clear the beach of obstacles and mine fields. Beyond the beach, the battle centered on the village of St. Laurent. This point had to be taken before vehicles could proceed inland. But St. Laurent was heavily defended and the exits remained blocked. As more and more vehicles became immobilized on Easy Red, the Germans increased their interdictory fire and the Third Auxers were alternately shaken by the devastation in the distance or showered with the flying debris.

"Cheer up, fellows. This can't last. There must be an easier way to make a living," said Captain Ferraro. At this moment, a shell struck within spitting distance. Ferraro felt something hit him in the back. He reached out. His radio was split in two. He breathed a sigh of relief. Might have been worse. Suddenly his leg went numb and blood trickled out from under his pants. He was the third casualty of the day. Both he and Captain Friedman were able to rejoin the Group several weeks later.

Towards evening, the shelling subsided somewhat and these Third Auxers advanced a few hundred yards up the bluff. Here they ran into another mine field and spent the night only a few hundred yards from the teams of Church and Higginbotham. None of these men would have been a bit surprised

if the Germans had pushed them back into the sea that night.

### *The Teams of Majors Peyton, Sutton, and Findlay*

The SS Empire Anvil discharged its remaining teams at H plus 6. These Third Auxers boarded an LCI and arrived an hour later at the control ship. All they knew was that they were supposed to land on the Easy sector but they had not the slightest idea what awaited them there.

After an hour of circling aimlessly, the LCI received instructions to attempt a landing. It got as far as the surf. Then three shells struck in rapid succession directly off the bow. They came from the emplacement at the D-3 draw and inflicted heavy damage but no casualties. Intimidated, the LCI backed away.

Two more times during the next hour, the LCI made a run for the beach but each time it was driven away. Finally, at H plus 10 there seemed to be an opportunity. The captain maneuvered his ship through the surf and ran her aground 75 yards from the water line. Clutching their bags, the men jumped off, waded through the waist-deep water, and stumbled ashore. They found themselves on Dog Red.

The first thing that happened was enough to convince them that they were in a hot spot. Findlay recognized the command party of the Engineers Special Brigade. Motioning his team to follow, he started towards the small group. A shell struck. One moment the men were approaching each other. The next moment they were all on the ground. When Findlay lifted his head he saw that his own teammate, Major Stahler, had been wounded in the neck. General Hogue was paralyzed from a wound of the spine and his adjutant was killed instantly.

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Such a scene would have unnerved any man. Not Findlay. Instantly he surveyed the damage and gave his directions. These men were plunged into a desperate situation five minutes after they landed.

During the next few hours Findlay and Peyton deployed their men at the water line and on the tidal flat, while Sutton tried to reach the shingle. Sutton happened to be on a part of the beach that became the scene of one of the most spectacular incidents of D Day. Shortly after the teams landed, a stranded ammunition ship was hit by an enemy shell and started a series of explosions that shook the area for hours. The first eruption caught Sutton and his men in a most exposed position, at arm's length of the holocaust. Fragments of steel rained down. The only protection was offered by

a disabled truck on the water's edge. For lack of something better, Sutton's team gathered under this truck. Their presence made a juicy target for the gun at les Moulins. Within a few minutes, the truck was brought under fire. Sutton and his men crawled towards the shingle without casualties.

Meanwhile Findlay's and Peyton's teams were doing what they could along the water line. It was disheartening in the extreme for these men to find themselves on the beach with nothing but a few morphine syrettes when their station should have been operating at capacity. But theirs was not to wonder why. Theirs was only to collect the wounded, to give first aid, and to shield themselves as far as that was possible. In this work T-4 Robert J. Smith distinguished



Pillbox on the west side of E-1 draw. This was directly opposite the one used by Findlay and his men. It is now a battle monument.

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himself in such a way that he was later awarded the Silver Star.

While these teams were thus engaged on the beach flat, a small reconnaissance part of the 61st Medical Battalion stumbled on the strong point on the east side of the E-1 draw. This strong point had been taken earlier in the day by Company E of the 16th RCT in a surprise action that marked the first tactical success of D Day. The first section of this company had been able to reach the top of the bluff halfway between E-1 and E-3 by blowing a gap in the barbed wire entanglement above the shingle and working its way through a mine field. They encountered machine gun fire but overpowered the Germans and then turned west along the bluff until they came upon the strong point at E-1. The Germans were taken completely by surprise. In a hand-to-hand combat the Americans gradually ousted the Germans from the outworks but without heavy weapons they could make no progress against the concrete emplacement itself. They now called for support from the destroyers. The resulting barrage was so effective that the heavily reinforced walls of the blockhouse buckled. The German guns were knocked askew and rendered useless. This finished the Germans. They raised the white flag and surrendered their position. Company "E" moved on to fresh victories and the blockhouse stood deserted until it was discovered by the men of the 61st Medical Battalion later in the day.

Thus, at H plus 10 there was finally established a place where casualties could be taken out of harm's way. The pillbox on Easy Red became the first medical installation worthy of the name on Omaha Beach and it continued as the only one of its kind until well into the next day. Even so, it was little more than a shelter of the most primitive sort and equipment was wholly lacking. There were only four walls and a

roof and the litter haul from the beach was a gruelling journey for the strongest men. Inside, the little space was quickly taken up. Enemy equipment and stacks of shells became intermingled with heaps of GI clothing and discarded weapons. Helmets, boots, splints, jackets, and rifles lay next to the personal belongings of the German gun-crew. As the casualties accumulated they were placed wherever there was room: on litters, on blankets, or directly on the cement floor. They lay there for the most part very still. Some had crude splints. Others had bulky, bloody dressings. But the majority had neither splints nor dressings. Their wounds were covered with layers of ill-smelling, gas-impregnated clothes and heavy, sticky combat-jackets. The pillbox became the focal point of all the suffering of the invasion beach.

The first teams to find their way to this spot were those of Findlay and Peyton and the first man to arrive was Captain Twarog. At this time the men of the 61st Medical Battalion were already snowed under. Daylight was quickly vanishing from the interior. In the semi-darkness, confusion became confounded. Prostrate forms were everywhere. Dead and dying lay next to those who still might live. To reach a litter in a far corner required sharp eyes, steady feet, and a strong stomach. The task of creating order was superhuman.

Third Auxers felt sick at heart. With nothing but morphine, plasma, and dressings, how could they hope to do the job they were supposed to do? How could they treat patients with peritonitis, with fractured femurs, with deep chest wounds? Was this what they had been practicing for these many months? It all seemed utterly futile, frustrating, and fantastic.

But such vacillations were only momentary. If the job could not be done according to the book, at least it might be done accord-

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ing to a man's ability. With Findlay and Peyton in charge, Third Auxers set to. Carefully and painstakingly, they moved from litter to litter. They examined every casualty, determined every injury, made every bit of equipment do double duty. They gave plasma, loosened tourniquets, strapped chest wounds. They even made up a priority list and selected the worst casualties for evacuation to the beach and to England. It was precious little but it was something.

At midnight, Findlay felt as if his back was broken and his head about to split. A fresh casualty had just been put down at the entrance. Findlay heard the rattling respirations and he knew that he had to act quickly. He hurried over, knelt down, and helped the man cough up the fluid that was drowning him. Then he discovered the cause of the trouble: a sucking wound of the chest. He had no vaseline gauze but he had a large battle dressing and he covered the wound with that. He inserted a needle in the man's chest and allowed the excess air to escape. Then he called for plasma.

The procedure for giving the plasma called for four assistants. Two men held a blanket across the exit, the third man handled the lantern, and the fourth one manipulated the bottle. With perspiration rolling off his back, Findlay felt for the patient's veins. Slowly he advanced the needle, first one way then another. This was the hardest venapuncture he had ever done.

Out of the stillness of the night came the roar of distant engines. The roar intensified with that peculiar wavering intensity of the German Messerschmitt. There were two explosions near the water's edge. Then the roar became deafening and one of the planes dropped a bomb almost at the blockhouse door. The blast knocked Findlay off his feet and sent great clouds of sand billowing into the pillbox. The wounded moaned. The medics cursed. Plasma bottles

were upset, sand seeped under dressings, blankets were blown away. In the Stygian darkness of that man-made catacomb, men were sorely tried and order was not re-established until another dawn. Such was D Day for the teams on Easy Red.

### *The Teams of Majors Campbell, Reiter, Hurwitz, and Williams*

On the night of D Day, six of the twenty teams in the invasion force were still at sea. Of these six, two were merely biding time off Utah but four were champing at the bit off Omaha, waylaid in their every attempt to make a landfall. They were the teams attached to the 60th Medical Battalion who made the crossing on an LCT with a rhino-ferry in tow.

Of all the various invasion craft, a rhino-ferry is least likely to inspire confidence. Designed solely for its carrying capacity, it is little more than a floating platform with maximum surface-area and minimum maneuverability. It has no armor, no guns, and few comforts. It is, in fact, a sitting duck. When Third Auxers boarded this modern ark, they nudged each other: "Well, we may be slow-motion but at least we won't go in until the beach is thoroughly safe." They were soon to find out how wrong they were.

If trouble loomed ahead, at least the Third Auxers would share it with others: personnel of the 364th Clearing Company, elements of the 29th Division, and a miscellany of other units. The men ensconced themselves as best they could between the trucks and dozers. At H Hour, two small engines at the stern began the laborious task of pushing the box through thirteen miles of rough water.

Progress was slow. The wind kicked up a heavy swell, and the rhino, with only two

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feet of freeboard, was definitely no rough-water craft. Spray came thick and fast. Everybody got soaked. The journey from the Transport Area to the Line of Departure took a full four hours.

The destination was Dog White. This sector had been penetrated by elements of the 116th Regimental Combat Team but at H plus 4 it was under constant fire. Landing heavy equipment was out of the question. Third Auxers could see what was taking place and they were not entirely disappointed when the rhino eased to a stop. In a fight between a rhino and an 88, the rhino would certainly come off second best.

At H plus 6, word came down: "Proceed to Dog White."

The engines sputtered into action. The men buttoned up their coats. Slowly the beach came nearer.

"What a crate," said Campbell to a fellow passenger. "I bet we aren't even doing three knots. How can those Krauts possibly miss us?"

"Well, the batteries are supposed to be out of action now, aren't they?" was the feeble reply.

"Supposed to be! A lot of things are supposed to be going on today. But are they?"

Campbell's fears were well founded. Two shells burst over the rhino, one to starboard and one to port. In the silence that followed came cries for help. Reiter clambered down from a truck.

"Where are you hurt, son?"

"Here, sir," was the answer. The man pointed to his groin.

"Okay, fellow. Just take it easy."

Quickly Reiter cut away the man's clothes. There it was. A deep wound of the groin with an injury to the underlying blood vessels. Good heavens! It couldn't be worse. Reiter shoved his thumb on the little fountain of blood.

It was impossible to move the man under such conditions. He would have bled to death. The surgery had to be done then and there. Mitcham brought up hemostats. Reiter went to work. With a few deft motions, he exposed the bleeding artery, placed his hemostats, and tied the ligature. It was a feat that called for coolness, precision, and luck. Reiter had all three and his patient lived to see another day.

Meanwhile the rhino had come to a halt fifty yards from the beach in water that was too deep to use the ramp. A run through the turbulent surf would certainly mean further hits. Could the rhino take it? The ensign thought no. He ordered the ramp down in the hope that the chains would hold.

Every man aboard was holding his breath. A captain of the engineers motioned for the first dozer to advance. Engine roaring, the machine started up. It reached the ramp. The inch-thick chains tightened, crunched, and snapped. The ramp gave way. The juggernaut pitched forward into the pounding waves, nose buried in the water, rear suspended on the rhino. The driver jumped for his life.

Third Auxers were at a loss. Should they try to reach the shore or should they stick with the rhino? Before they could make up their minds, the ensign threw his engine into reverse. For a moment there was a struggle between the tugging rhino and the sagging dozer. The rhino won and the dozer came to rest in its watery grave.

"What are we going to do?" asked Hurwitz of the ensign.

"Get back into open water," was the answer.

"Can we try again without our ramp?"

"No use. We'd only drown these dozers."

The ensign knew his business. He maneuvered his craft around obstacles, past the wreck of an LCT, and back towards the open sea. But before he could carry out his

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intention of transferring his cargo to a more seaworthy vessel, he was accosted by another control ship.

"Rhino-ferry, rhino-ferry! Proceed to Dog Red."

"I've lost my ramp!"

"Proceed to Dog Red! Proceed to Dog Red!"

The ensign shrugged his shoulders. "Wouldn't you know it?" he remarked to Hurwitz. "Some joker thinks he's smart. Well, I won't argue with him." And with that, he swung the rhino into a wide arc.

At Dog Red, trouble of another sort was waiting. On its agonizingly slow approach to the beach, the rhino tangled with an under-water obstacle. Nobody saw it. But everybody knew it. There was a scraping sound and the starboard engine was ripped loose.

A rhino-ferry is a difficult craft to manage, even with both engines going. It has an awkward shape, disproportionate bulk, and very little draft. With one engine gone, the odds were overwhelming. Another rhino blocked its path. A strong current clawed at its broadside. Gradually the monster went into a side-slip. No matter how the ensign tried, he could not keep the vessel straight. Pounded by the waves, whipped by the wind, and deflected by the current, the rhino slowly drifted towards the east. The situation was beyond retrieving.

Then, the other rhino made its bid. Third Auxers watched intently. As soon as the ramp came down, shells began to hit. It was

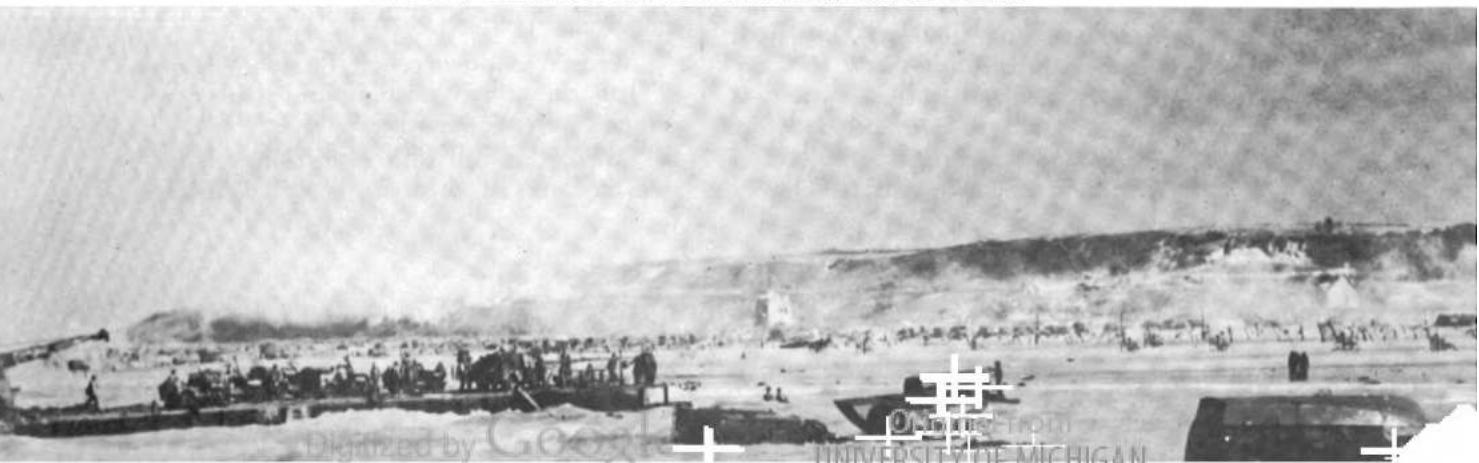
all done very methodically. Every vehicle became a target as soon as it reached the beach. Not one escaped. It was a devastating spectacle and Third Auxers could only thank their lucky stars that their own rhino was *bors de combat*.

The Third Aux rhino was no longer seaworthy. It started working its way out of the surf. Shells and obstacles barred the way repeatedly and the whole process lasted well over an hour. Finally it reached open water. As it limped its way past one of the control vessels, there came yet another shouted command, a command that summed up the wisdom of the moment in masterful fashion: "Rhino-ferry, rhino-ferry, return to sea!"

There is an old saying that a man is not a soldier until he has heard the boom of guns and smelled the blood of his buddies. The Third Auxers on the rhino-ferry had done both. They had been punished by shell fire and they had seen their shipmates struck down. D Day had made soldiers of them, soldiers in the hardest kind of battle: a losing battle. Wet, sick, and exhausted, they lay down on the dozers.

On the night of D Day Omaha Beach was a place of horror to the Third Auxers. To Serbst and his men, it was a miserable anti-tank ditch. To Peyton and Findlay and their men, it was a bombed pillbox. To Sutton, Stoller, Meyers, Church, and Higginbotham, and their men, it was a wretched foxhole. To Campbell, Reiter, Hurwitz, Williams, and their men, it was a strip of beach where everything had been wiped out. These Third Auxers saw only total defeat.

Rhino ferry coming in at Dog Red. In the background, les Moulins.



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But they were wrong. Actually, the groundwork for victory had been laid. How had it been done?

It had been done by the bounce and drive of the American troops. These troops had not been stopped by the fierce opposition. They had only been slowed. True, the losses on the beach were much greater than expected and the heavy equipment had floundered. But by noon of D Day, isolated groups were roaming the country beyond the beach and these groups met only scattered, disorganized, piecemeal resistance. If the Germans had shown the same fighting spirit as in the beginning of the war, things might have been quite different. A single battalion at Colleville at noon of D Day could have pushed the Americans back into the sea. A single company of tanks at St. Laurent could have made the beachhead untenable. But the Germans lacked aerial observation to determine these critical points and they had to be content with a heavy bombardment of the beach and with small-scale counterattacks in the interior.

By night of D Day the essential elements of five regiments were ashore and these elements were everywhere on the offensive. They had infiltrated St. Laurent, surrounded Colleville, and by-passed Vierville. They had silenced the strong points covering the beach and they had fought to victory at Pointe du Hoe. Thus the stage was set for the follow-up.

Medically the situation was extremely precarious however. On the night of D Day when the clearing stations should have been in full operation there were only a few scattered first-aid posts on all of Omaha. One of these was the pillbox on Easy Red. Another was the anti-tank ditch on Easy Green. Still another was at the les Moulins draw. Here a small group of personnel of the 60th Medical Battalion gathered late in the afternoon, after having battled heavy

odds on the western part of the beach. As early as H plus 2½ an officer and an enlisted man from this battalion had landed near the D-3 exit. They did not get beyond the sea wall. Later they stumbled on to a jeep with plasma and established a collecting point nearby. At H plus 4 an LCT came in at this point and the two medics, aided by members of a Navy demolition squad, were able to place about thirty casualties aboard. It was the only evacuation until nighttime.

At H plus 8 three officers and twenty-five enlisted men of the 60th Medical Battalion landed on Easy Green. They made their way to Serbst's anti-tank ditch and helped with the work there. At about the same time a truck of the 634th Clearing Station made a landfall. It carried tents, sterile linen, instruments, and a small amount of plasma, litters, and blankets. This truck became immobilized on the D-3 exit because of heavy fighting near St. Laurent. Its occupants retreated to a demolished house nearby and set up a first-aid post where they treated about fifty casualties that night. This was the only truck of all the beach clearing stations to come ashore on D Day. It was to play an important part in the developments of the next day.

Morning of D plus 1 dawned dank, drab, and dreary. The men in the foxholes were so cold they could hardly stir. The men in the anti-tank ditch peered over their ramparts. The men in the pillbox tried to create order. The next step was up to the men on the rhino.

At seven o'clock the teams of Campbell, Williams, and Reiter transferred to an LCVP (Hurwitz and his men followed two hours later).

"Thank God we're off," said Williams. "That rhino was nothing but bad news. Hope I never see another."

"Well, this tub isn't everything either," was Sapienza's comforting reply. "At least,

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the rhino had a reverse. This thing can only go forward or sink."

The words were prophetic. At two hundred yards, the LCVP struck an under-water obstacle. The Third Auxers heard an ominous ripping sound. A big gash appeared in the bottom of the boat. Water gushed in. The Third Auxers jumped out. The LCVP slowly sank.

The water at this point was five feet deep, too deep for a man of Hillman's stature. Weighted down with pounds and pounds of equipment, Hillman leaped, splashed frantically, and disappeared. A stream of air bubbles marked the spot.

Help was not far away. Sapienza, a lean six-footer with plenty of brawn, reached out and grabbed Hillman by the seat of the pants. "Steady, Joe!" were his words as he pushed his half-drowned teammate towards shallow water. One Third Auxer saved another.

Easy Green at eight o'clock on D plus 1 was very much as it had been all through D Day with the exception that shelling was now sporadic. Wrecked equipment littered the beach. Here and there, a lone soldier struggled towards the top of the bluff. There was no organized activity and there was no way for the Third Auxers to tell where they were. All their personal equipment was lost in the surf. The men were drenched, winded, and weak, and they felt utterly whipped. In this impasse, they decided to cross the tidal flat and look for clues.

The first thing they came to was the anti-tank ditch where Serbst was wearily directing the rescue work. The men practically embraced each other. For a brief moment they fell to talking about their experiences. Then they faced realities.

"There is not much you can do here," said Serbst. "The 1st Division medics are trying to set up a station on the bluff. Maybe you

can help them. I haven't seen a sign of our own stations yet."

"Well, let's go up and see," said Campbell.

"Go ahead. But stick to the bluff. The draw isn't safe yet," said Serbst.

The teams split. Williams and Campbell took their men up the bluff. Reiter decided on a reconnaissance of his own.

The 1st Division medics had landed on Easy Green the night before. Since there still was no definite front, they had decided to stay on the beach and to erect their tents on the bluff overlooking the E-3 draw. When Campbell and Williams and their men appeared on the scene, the tents were just going up. Equipment was scattered on the ground. Casualties were beginning to arrive. Officers were trying to figure out how to make a hospital out of their station. (Division clearing stations did not have the special issue of equipment that had been given to the beach clearing stations.)

The Third Auxers rolled up their sleeves. If there was no equipment, they would improvise it. Autoclaves? They would boil the linens. Anesthesia machines? They would make one. Instruments? They would get along with half a set. Skin drapes? They would use bath towels. They patched and they mended and they made do. At noon, the station was declared open and Third Auxers went to work. It was the first major surgery on the beachhead.

While these two teams were thus getting under way, Reiter decided on an attempt to find the 634th Clearing Company. He knew that some of the personnel had come ashore and he also knew that one of the trucks was near les Moulins. His job was to locate this truck. The map told him that his position was east of the D-3 draw. The 634th was supposed to set up west of the draw. Serbst had warned him that the draw itself was not safe. Reiter took his men inland, hoping to find a place where he could cross.

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His path led over open country. The terrain here was unfavorable to the defense and the Germans had built no fortifications. From the beach to the head of the draw was barely half a mile. Before long Reiter found himself looking down on a cluster of houses that was St. Laurent.

There was little to be seen. St. Laurent had been entered by troops of the 116th Regimental Combat Team on the night of D Day but Germans had re-entered the village during the night and on the morning of D plus 1 the battle was in full swing. There were no noisy barrages or spectacular charges however. The Americans proceeded methodically. Each house harboring Germans was brought under concentrated small arms fire until it could be rushed. The proceedings were more apparent to the ear than to the eye and a man could wander down the main street without seeing either friend or foe.

Thus it was that the battle engulfed the Third Auxers without the slightest warning. One moment they were walking along the road, the next moment they were caught in a cross-fire that singed their ears. Every man acted according to his individual impulse and resourcefulness. Some froze where they were. Some crawled to the ditch. Some looked for weapons. Some were pinned down. Some found their way back to the beach. The net result was that the team evaporated.

Reiter and Mitcham had dived for the same ditch. As soon as the firing subsided, they held council. Obviously, their effort to reach the west side of the draw was premature. An infantryman told them that the Germans continued heavy resistance at the crossroads southwest of the village. The only avenue open was the draw itself. It was exposed terrain which came under sporadic fire from German marauders along the bluff. But there was no choice. Reiter and

Mitcham decided to take a chance, fully aware of the dangers. They simply had to find the lost truck.

They disentangled themselves from the melee at St. Laurent and started towards the beach, moving a few hundred feet at a time. When they had gone about halfway, they became aware of a figure coming up the draw. The Third Auxers sought cover. Suddenly it dawned on them that this was Major Bauer, the Commanding Officer of the 634th. The men greeted each other with boundless enthusiasm.

"But where is the truck?" was Reiter's first question.

"Can't find any sign of it," was the answer. "I've been everywhere except down there . . . ." And Bauer pointed over his shoulder towards les Moulins.

"Well, if that's where it is, let's go find it."

The three men started out. They kept a sharp lookout, both for trucks and for snipers. And their fearlessness was rewarded. On the outskirts of les Moulins, they saw it: a big six-by-six with a large red cross. It stood there quite unmolested, just as it had been driven ashore the previous day.

Reiter jumped a foot. Here was what he had risked his life for! But why had the truck been left here? Where was the driver? What had become of the rest of the company? The answer was not long in forthcoming.

"Major! Please come over. We need you." The voice came from a half-destroyed house across the road. Reiter and Mitcham dashed over.

There was no question that help was needed here. Nominally, les Moulins was in American hands but actually it was full of German snipers. They were ensconced mainly in the houses but also in some of the trenches which they had re-occupied during the night. Passing troops had suffered heavily and there were several dozen casualties.

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Reiter's first thought was to go back to the truck and get the supplies.

"Don't cross that road, Major. The last man who tried it was shot."

"Shot? I don't see any Krauts."

"They are everywhere. That house is full of them." And the sergeant pointed to a house at the intersection. "They shoot even though they know that we are trying to take care of these casualties."

"The bastards!"

Reiter and Bauer looked at each other. Two immediate tasks confronted them. One was to start first aid for the casualties. The other was to gain possession of the truck. Reiter volunteered for the more hazardous of the two: "I'll stay here. You see if you can drive the truck away, Bauer."

Without losing a minute, Reiter went to work. The first casualty he examined was a man with a badly injured leg. The fellow had propped himself up on his elbows and was scanning the vicinity, gun in hand.

"Put that gun down, fellow," said Reiter. "You are through for a while."

"Yes sir. But there is a sniper up there and I think I can get him."

"Well, hold your horses until I can examine you." And with those words Reiter started cutting through the layers of clothing to expose the damage. For a moment, all he could see was that leg. Then there was a terrific blast right under his nose. It almost bowled him over.

"What the hell!!!"

"I got him, Major. Do you see that window? That's where he was! I got him!"

"Sergeant, you put that gun down or I won't take care of you," said Reiter with admirable restraint. Then he straightened up. "Everybody put his gun down. This is a first-aid post. The first man who fires will be pitched out."

But the men were so keyed up that Reiter's

words had little effect. The Germans kept on firing. The Americans fired back. Bullets ricocheted everywhere. Twice, men who had already been wounded were struck again. Each time the volume of counter-fire built up to a regular volley. Here was a first-aid station that also served as observation post, firing line, and sniper trap. There were no rear areas on Omaha Beach.

Reiter and Mitcham paid no heed. While the battle was going on around them, they went from one casualty to the next, dressing wounds, stauching hemorrhage, and giving morphine. They acted only according to the dictates of their consciences and they gave a fine display of courage in the face of great physical danger. If any Third Auxers deserve that medal for service "above and beyond the call of duty," it is these two.



Les Moulins. It was in this trench that Reiter tended casualties while the battle raged.

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Meanwhile Bauer had sneaked across the road and started the truck. He was lucky. The Germans ignored him and he drove off in the only available direction, straight up the draw. He went halfway to St. Laurent, drove the truck off the road, and selected a point for the station. Gradually he gathered up his men. The truck was unloaded. A tent was pitched. A second truck arrived. More equipment came in. The other members of Reiter's team found their way down from St. Laurent. Casualties were brought in. Reiter and Mitcham were able to join the station. Hurwitz's team landed and made its way to the area. Word spread. And at six o'clock, the 634th proudly opened its doors. It was the first beach clearing station to go into operation and the second place on

Omaha where surgery was being done. Things were looking up.

The over-all medical situation remained ominous however. Except for the 634th, the beach clearing stations were stalled. Third Auxers were either immobilized by sniper fire or scattered in a futile search for their trucks. First-priority casualties were still going back to England instead of receiving care on the beachhead. And the six relief-teams of the Fourth Aux were being detained off-shore because of the general delay in the landings.

Tactically, the situation on D plus 1 improved. On the eastern subsector, the 1st Division extended its perimeter for a full three miles. In the western subsector, the 29th Division did not go quite so fast but it



**Major Reiter's team. Standing: Torrado, Hayman, Smazal, Reiter. Squatting: Mitcham, Peluso, Anderson, Schmidt.**

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did reach Pointe du Hoe where the Rangers had gained their first foothold. The total length of the beachhead was now eight miles, its depth two miles. The beach was ready for heavy equipment. The enemy was still at a loss where to strike back.

D plus 2 saw the opening of two of the three beach clearing stations of the 61st Medical Battalion. The 393rd set up on a site 800 yards inland from Easy Green and went into operation at six in the evening with the teams of Stoller and Meyers. The 391st set up inland from Easy Red and went into operation at almost the same time with the teams of Serbst, Peyton, Findlay, and Sutton.

D plus 2 also brought a very welcome shipment of Fourth Aux teams. There were six of them and they went to work at the existing stations forthwith. The same ship that delivered these teams also put two ranking medical officers ashore: Colonel Rogers and Colonel Crisler. They immediately surveyed the situation and laid plans for the time when Army would take over. Parts of the 13th and of the 51st Field Hospitals also landed, but not in sufficient numbers to go into operation. The beachhead now stretched twenty miles in an east-west direction and three to five miles inland. The beach was nearly clear of debris and was no longer under observed artillery fire. A lateral road running the length of the beach was rapidly nearing completion and many exit roads had been built across the tidal flat. Ammunition began to arrive. Reinforcements poured in.

On D plus 3, the 392nd went into operation inland from Fox Green. It opened at eight o'clock in the evening with the teams of Church and Higginbotham. The 1st Division Clearing Station now vacated its site and moved inland. Field hospitals continued to land personnel but were still unable to set up for lack of equipment. The beachhead continued to expand. Troops reached the

railroad tracks from Bayeau to St. Lo in several places.

On D plus 4, all the beach clearing stations were under way. One platoon of the 13th Field Hospital set up near Colleville. The first air evacuation took place from a strip near the 393rd. Blood began to arrive from England. Third Auxers quickly became battle-hardened veterans.

The heaviest fighting on Omaha took place during the first four days. After that, the Germans realized that the main threat lay in the Utah sector and they shifted their troops in that direction. Omaha now settled down to a holding action. The 1st Division was deployed in the east; the 2nd Division, which had begun landing on D plus 1, was in the center; and the 29th Division expanded westward until it effected a junction with the Utah forces.

On D plus 5, First Army became operational and Colonel Crisler began shifting the teams from the clearing stations to the field hospitals. This transfer continued for the next few days until the normal chain of evacuation was established.

It was on D plus 5 that the Third Aux suffered its only fatality. T-5 John Malone was a Third Aux clerk who had been loaned to the 51st Field Hospital. He landed with that unit on D plus 2 and was last seen alive at two o'clock in the afternoon on D plus 5. A full investigation of his disappearance was made later but the true facts have never been revealed. The report of the examining board states:

"John H. Malone was on temporary duty with the 51st Field Hospital and met his death presumably on 11 June. As far as can be determined he was not ordered to leave the area on any mission or detail and no one knows where he went or why. Following

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his failure to return, an unsuccessful search was made and a casualty message was submitted to the Commanding General of the ETO stating only that he was missing in action. During the ensuing investigation, the 51st Field Hospital Adjutant visited the various cemeteries and inquired at the Graves Registration Office. On 16 July he discovered a burial report dated 29 June and indicating that the missing soldier had been buried in the First Army cemetery in the St. Laurent sector.

The next day the First Sergeant of the Third Auxiliary Group was sent to visit the cemetery in an attempt to learn more about his death. The burial report indicated that he had been buried at 10:30 AM on 25 June in Grave 148, Row 8, Plot H. One tag had been interred with the remains and the other attached to the marker on the grave. No report could be obtained from the Graves Registration Officer concerning the place where the body was found and no medical reports or emergency medical tag could be found to indicate the presence of any wounds or injuries which might have caused his death.

The cause of death could not be determined but was believed to be enemy action inasmuch as the area contained numerous land mines and was still blanketed by anti-aircraft fire. Enemy snipers were also known to be active in the vicinity. Owing to the tactical situation and the great confusion of troops moving through the area, it was extremely difficult to trace his movements immediately preceding death. In the absence of any positive factual information, it was held by the investigating board that John H. Malone died in line of duty."

While John Malone thus took his story to his grave with him, other Third Auxers

lived to tell theirs. There was pathos and bathos, drama and trivia, the sublime and the ridiculous. Let Major Campbell speak.

"It happened on D plus 3 at the 634th. I was trying to triage a fresh batch of casualties when I spotted an infantry colonel with a gunshot wound of the abdomen.

'How come, Colonel?' I said. 'I always thought that a man of your rank played it safe.'

'Damndest thing in the world,' he said. 'We were advancing on the railroad tracks west of Bayeux. The Krauts were dug in solid. They had us stopped cold. I couldn't get my men to budge. I couldn't even get the battalion commanders to budge. I figured that we just had to get across those tracks. After all, the Army had paid me for twenty years to do this one thing. If I flunked now I was a dud. So I blew my whistle. I shouted for the men to follow me. And I jumped up. Do you know how far I got? Three steps!! Just three steps!! That's all I have contributed to this battle. And it took me twenty years to do that! Disgusting, isn't it? Do you think I'll make it?'

I examined him. He had been hit by two bullets, both in the abdomen. Within half an hour I had him on the table. When I got in there I could see that I was in for a rough deal. Blood, pus, and corruption. I started cleaning up.

Just then I heard someone shout GAS! What a spot to have a gas attack. I looked around. If I stopped now, the colonel was a goner. So I kept working. Then someone else shouted GAS! We all broke out in a cold sweat.

Netz tried to be facetious about it: 'You know, the only fellow who is safe here is the patient. He's already got his mask on. But what about the rest of us?' I still

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couldn't make up my mind. Then the gas alarm sounded. That was too much. After all, if I died at my post, the patient would die too. So he did not have much to lose. We just had to get out of there and get our masks. Then, I had a sudden sinking spell. We had left our masks in the pup tents, two hundred yards away! Damnation!

'Give me a towel,' I said. I put the guts back in the abdomen and draped the towel over them. I ripped off my gloves. 'Everybody get his mask,' I shouted. 'On the double!'

You should have seen us. Over the rutted field, past the motor pool, across the fox-holes we dashed. It was a great sprint but it thoroughly winded us.

Did you ever try to unroll a 50-pound bedding roll when the smell of gas is already in your nostrils? Well, we did. And we set a record. But to put that mask on while we were panting was out of the question. We struggled back, mask in hand, tongue hanging out. What a rat race.

Back at the operating tent, the scene became even more ludicrous. One man had brought not only his mask but also his gas-protective clothing and he proceeded to make a complete change on the spot. Another man began to rub his face with that special ointment. Somebody else squatted under his gas cape and tried to carry on that way. Nobody knew just what to do, least of all myself.

I put my mask on but forgot to wipe the lenses. Then I scrubbed, got into my gloves, and returned to the litter. The colonel was just as I had left him. Hadn't even stirred. I threw the towel off and tried to see. *Tried to!* It was like looking at London through the fog. My glasses were all steamed up. And here I was with my gloves on. Couldn't do anything about it. Well, it turned out that I had to take out three feet of gut. That was the hardest operation I ever did. Just muddled my way through. And then, as I was finishing, the CO came in dead-pan

Omaha on D plus 3. This shows a well-organized exit road.



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and said: 'Never mind, boys. Somebody made a mistake!'

The patient? It was Colonel McKinley of the 1st Division and he got well without a hitch."

Other Third Auxers could match this story but it is impossible to do them all justice. Enough has been said to paint the picture. The beachheads were a place of dire peril and cruel disappointments. Third Auxers tasted them all. They toiled, they forged, and they accomplished. Just how much they accomplished can only be hinted at.

The statistical summary which is presented in the last chapter shows that Third Auxers operated on almost nine hundred casualties during that first critical week. This figure does not tell the full story however. It refers only to actual operations and says nothing about the triage, the resuscitative work, and the innumerable on-the-spot measures that often meant the difference between life and death. Neither does the figure bring out the fearsome conditions un-

der which the work had to be done. In spite of all the preparations, surgeons still had to cope with inadequate equipment, anesthetists with improvised apparatus, and technicians with back-breaking labor. To give only one example. There were no fracture tables in the clearing stations. Hip spicas were put on with the patient supported on a bucket. Anyone who has tried it knows the physical labor involved.

These nine hundred casualties may not seem like a great many, but, in a way, they are the crowning achievement of the Group because they were for the most part pure salvage. Suddenly, the Third Aux paid off. Suddenly, it became the mainstay. Suddenly, it became a vital group of forward surgeons. The transformation was fantastic and it left many Third Auxers speechless.

For their work on the beach, ten Third Auxers received the Purple Heart, two the Silver Star, and sixty-nine the Bronze Star. These were the official rewards. The inner rewards are quite beyond expression. They are the inalienable property of every man who was there. Every Third Auxer knows that he was a vital link and he is both proud and humble. He helped make history.



## Chapter IX



# From Normandy to the Siegfried Line

The Normandy campaign went through three stages: the capture of Cherbourg, the build-up, and the break-through. Then followed the triumphant dash to the German border and weary stalemate at the Siegfried Line. The Third Aux was never far from the center of gravity.

### *The Drive for Cherbourg*

After the junction of the beachheads, the next objective was to seal the Cotentin peninsula and to seize Cherbourg. It took just two weeks.

First, the southern flank was made secure. Here, the 82nd Airborne was joined by the 90th Division and the 9th Division. Progress was slow until 15 June when the 82nd and the 9th attacked in a westward direction and covered nearly 2,500 yards. The advance continued and on 18 June elements of the 9th reached the sea at Barneville sur Mer and St. Lo d'Ourville. The peninsula was cut off. The 82nd Airborne and the 90th Infantry, together with the 101st Airborne, now turned south to hold the line while VII Corps turned its attention to the north.

On 18 June, three divisions jumped off for Cherbourg. The heaviest fighting took place around Montebourg and Valognes, towns that were completely destroyed in the process. Once these points were taken,

the advance was rapid. The attack began on 22 June with a heavy aerial bombardment. The ancient fortifications were no match for the combined air-ground attack. On 25 June Cherbourg passed into American hands.

It was during this phase of the campaign that the last elements of the Third Aux arrived in Normandy. On 22 June the SS Empire Lance brought the long-awaited nurses, the two remaining teams, and the Headquarters Detachment. The Channel crossing started badly but ended well. Officers and men were relegated to the hold where the air was foul, the bunks wretched, and the crowding frightful. The nurses, on the other hand, had been put up in the gymnasium where they had plenty of fresh air, comfortable cots, and ample room.

Gradually, the contingent in the hold began to infiltrate the gymnasium. The nurses retreated to a corner, the others took over the main floor, and by morning the whole place had been converted into a coeducational institution! Whereupon a very British major who observed the scene from a balcony inquired in utter astonishment: "I say . . . . do the Americans always live like that?"

The Empire Lance discharged its passengers on Omaha and the Third Aux went into a two-day bivouac at St. Laurent. Now came the time for the nurses to go into action. At this point, a departure from ac-

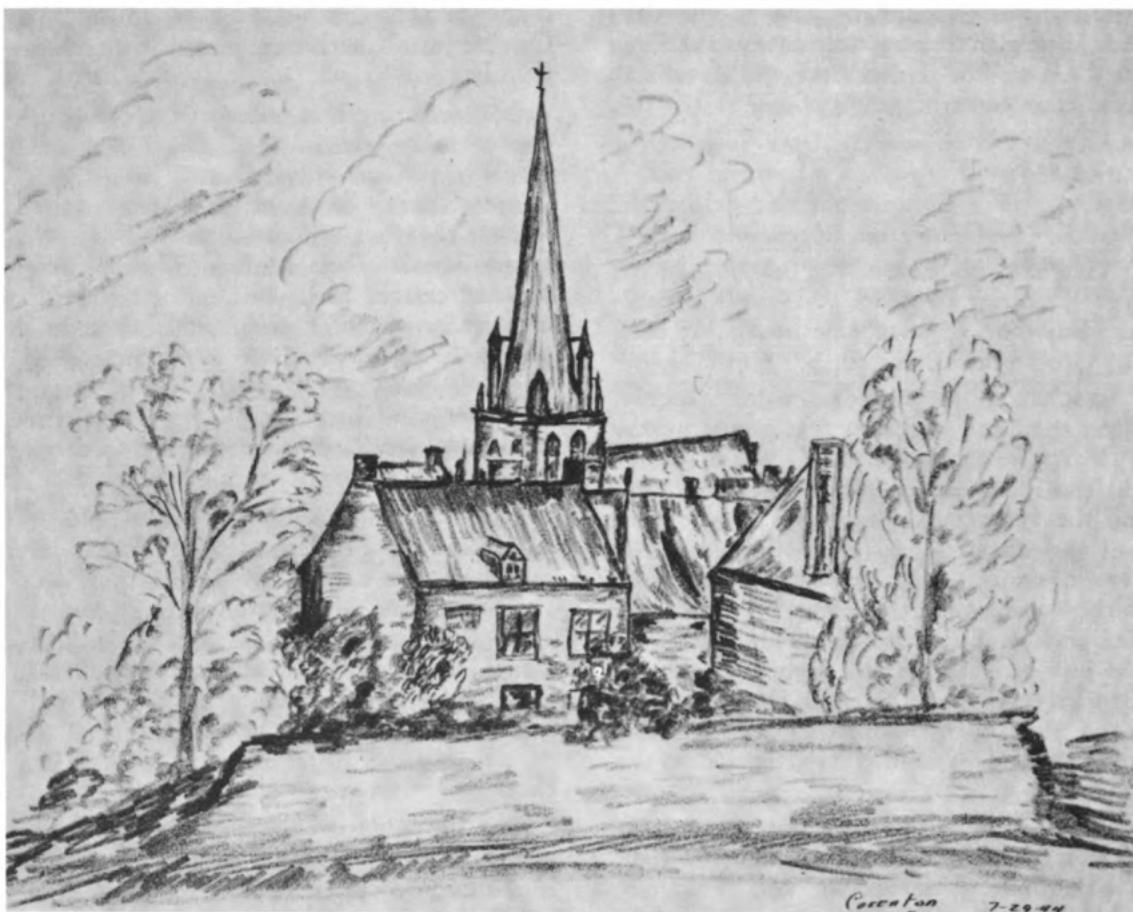
## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

cepted procedure was made. Third Auxers felt that the nurses should work for the teams, rather than be farmed out on a hit-or-miss basis as they had been in the Mediterranean Theater. Two courses lay open. The nurses could be attached to the teams or they could be attached to the field hospitals. Each plan had its advantages and disadvantages. Third Aux Headquarters decided to attach the nurses to the field hospitals. The reasoning was somewhat as follows:

A field hospital handles only the first-priority casualties. In the table of organi-

zation, this function was not provided for. A platoon with a capacity of a hundred patients had only six nurses! Nurses work in shifts so that only three are available at any one time! Three nurses cannot do justice to a hundred very ill surgical patients. Under the proposed plan, the Third Aux nurses would be part and parcel of the hospital staff and they could be used not only in the operating room but also in the post-operative wards.

In the second place, the greatest nursing shortage was at the field hospital, rather than at the evacuation hospital. If nurses are at-



The church at Carentan.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

tached to teams, they work at evacuation hospitals approximately twenty per cent of the time. The new plan made certain that all Third Aux nurses would be at the field hospitals all the time.

And finally, a Third Aux nurse on permanent duty at a field hospital platoon would become thoroughly familiar with the equipment of that particular platoon. On permanent status she could exercise more authority than she could on a here-today, gone-tomorrow basis. She would be a liaison agent between the team and the hospital nurses. Her whole position would be strengthened and her usefulness increased.

As it worked out, the Third Aux nurses functioned chiefly as operating room supervisors. They taught the technicians to run the autoclaves, to prepare the patients, and to assist at the table. They were in charge of supplies and they were responsible for the instruments. One Third Aux nurse was usually on duty in the receiving tent and, if everything was going smoothly, another might be helping out on the postoperative ward. There was never any reason to regret this plan.

When the nurses arrived in Normandy, First Army had four field hospitals: the 13th, the 42nd, the 45th, and the 51st. The 47th was attached towards the end of July and the 42nd was detached after the Bulge. The initial assignments were as follows (the list is incomplete) :

### 13TH FIELD HOSPITAL

FIRST PLATOON: Maribel Dorton, Bunetta Bixby, Anne M. Bisignano, Dorothy Aird.

SECOND PLATOON: Evelyn T. Hanley, Isobel Johnson, Verine B. Nace, Virginia Scharbaugh.

THIRD PLATOON: Virginia F. Armbruster, Geraldine Jones, Madalyn H. Andreko, Marcelle M. Johnson.

### 42ND FIELD HOSPITAL

FIRST PLATOON: Betty Ferber, Mary Fedor, Grace V. Bayless, Marie V. Miller.

SECOND PLATOON: Flonnie Boone,

THIRD PLATOON: Ruth A. Maher, Evelyn J. Boesling, Esther Laden, Mary E. Asselin.

### 45TH FIELD HOSPITAL

FIRST PLATOON: Florence Grimes, Reba J. Green.

SECOND PLATOON: Marjorie A. Bruce, Joyce A. Walther, Irene Bovee, Gladys M. Snyder.

THIRD PLATOON: Janet Snyder, Mary L. Benham, Louise V. Tomback, Mary H. Estes.

### 51ST FIELD HOSPITAL

FIRST PLATOON: Dorothy M. Dietrich, Retha Stoker, Lottie Meyers, Betty G. Ryan.



Major McCafferty, First Army Chief Nurse.

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**SECOND PLATOON:** Florence Bestman, Mildred A. Radawiecz, Clara K. Watry, Helen D. Johnson.

**THIRD PLATOON:** S. Shirley Ralph, Edna M. Parker, Gertrude M. Trainor, Eleanor E. Bernick.

### 5TH EVACUATION HOSPITAL

Ann Kalosh, Norine Webster, Emma I. Doty.

### 41ST EVACUATION HOSPITAL

Mary Marsec, Mabel E. Jessop, Clara Hubbard, Alberta Bleau.

A field hospital platoon ordinarily set up in ten ward tents. At least four of these were laced together in the form of a cross.

These four tents were the hub: receiving, x-ray and laboratory, operating, and post-operative. In this manner a casualty could be admitted, triaged, resuscitated, operated on, and followed up without having to move more than a few yards at a time.

A receiving tent operating at capacity presented a unique spectacle. Casualties were delivered anywhere from one hour to several days after injury. The average was four to six hours. Contrary to what one might expect, these soldiers rarely made a noise. With the grime and dirt of the battlefield still on their faces and in their wounds, they were preoccupied with what they were doing when they were struck. Some mumbled about the grenade or the shell or the booby trap that hit him. Others



A field hospital from the air. Note the extended cross of ward tents. This photo was taken in Holland.

lay quite still or groaned softly. Most were in shock. All took it for granted that they would recover. Hadn't they been told that only three per cent died? How fortunate that they did not know the facts. The *overall* mortality did indeed run to about three per cent, but in the field hospital it was closer to twenty-five per cent. Often it went even higher!

Third Auxers quickly learned that field hospital casualties were of three kinds: one-third had abdominal injuries, another third had chest injuries, (often combined with abdominal injuries), and the remaining third had severe extremity injuries. Combinations were common. In fact, about one-third of all casualties had multiple wounds, usually a desperate situation.

In the dim light of a tent, one casualty looked like another. Actually, no two were alike. There was no telling what the wounds would show, once the bloody blankets had been discarded and the clumsy dressings cut away. There might be just one small puncture wound or there might be a hundred jagged lacerations. One man with a tiny perforation in the flank might be in profound shock while the next one with part of his intestines out on the abdomen would nonchalantly ask for a cigarette.

When a Third Auxer recalls his experiences in the receiving tent, one or two incidents will probably stand out in sharp relief. Perhaps he will see the mortally wounded sergeant who used his last breath to say: "Please get me back to my platoon. There's nobody knows those boys like me." Perhaps he will see the raw recruit who pleaded: "Major, please take my leg off. I know it's no good." Perhaps he will see the fatally burned paratrooper who charged into a flame thrower to bayonet his attacker. Perhaps he will see the arrogant German *feldwebel* who clawed at his splints and spat at the nurse. Perhaps he will see the dis-



The receiving tent of a field hospital. These casualties have not been triaged yet.



Receiving tent. Resuscitation has started.

Mary Benham fixes the liners for the operating tent.



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The operating tent.



The postoperative tent was a fantastic sight.  
Picture taken at the 51st Field Hospital during the Bulge.



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ciplined grenadier who sat at attention when he was spoken to and keeled over dead two minutes later. A receiving tent showed human nature in the raw.

Resuscitation was next. It involved everything from blood transfusions to bronchoscopy. Then came the diagnostic procedures, the x-rays, the catheterizations, the intubations, everything that modern surgery demands. The technician took over a great many of these tasks. They learned quickly and they developed great skill.

From the receiving ward the casualty went to the operating tent. Here, in a narrow, rectangular space with sloping roof and muddy floor, the surgical team held forth. Conditions might be primitive but performance was superb. Two or three operating tables filled all available space. White liners hung from the canvas to improve the light and keep dirt from dropping on the wounds. Improvised reflectors cast their beams on the litters. The team distributed itself. Usually, the leader worked with the second assistant. The first assistant worked at the other table with a technician. The anesthetist went back and forth. At any time he might be called to the receiving tent for an emergency. In a civilian hospital, casualties of this sort would throw the receiving room into uproar for hours. In the field hospital, they came in by the ambulance-load, not once a day but all day and all night.

The postoperative tent too was a fantastic sight. Every cot was flanked by a pole with a bottle of glucose or blood. Some patients had chest tubes draining into water-seal bottles. Others had nasal tubes emptying into the field-version of a suction apparatus. Still others had bladder catheters or oxygen masks or plaster casts. Each patient fought his own battle. The days were long, the nights were cold, the cots were hard, the comforts were meager. As long as there was work to do, Third Auxers did it.

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A working day in a field hospital was twelve hours, but the day was not over at the end of that. Many tasks remained. The main one was the postoperative care which took up several more hours. Paper work was another chore. Field hospital charts were necessarily brief but many Third Auxers in addition kept records of their own. The statistics that are presented in the last chapter are based on laborious tabulations that required a great deal of work. Third Auxers also spent much time improving their equipment, analyzing their experiences, and streamlining their routine. The field hospital was no place for a lazy man.

Living conditions were primitive. During the first three weeks, everybody slept in pup tents. As long as the weather was dry and the sleeping bag intact, a pup tent was a home of a sort. But when the skies were wet, the ground became a sponge and no amount of practical hydraulics could keep the water out. It so happened that the summer of 1944 was exceptionally wet. Third Auxers quickly learned to pitch their tent on a gentle slope and to ring it with a drainage ditch. Provident characters pitched their tent over a foxhole to gain added protection, but they spent most of their time bailing water and digging through the sand for lost articles.

The pup tent era came to an end, at least for the officers, when Headquarters brought pyramidal tents. A pyramidal tent is still a long way from the comforts of home but at least it permits conversation and, sometimes, even reading. Sometimes the hospital power plant could be tapped. Such refinements did not come until much later, however. During the first months, a man depended upon his own wits for survival.

At first everybody lived on K rations. Each ration consisted of a neat little carton containing a package of musty crackers, a chunk of acrid cheese, a brick of indigestible



Ruth Maher packs drums.



Phil Partington scrubs up.

Coffin and Binter do the work while Joe Green looks on. Picture taken at first platoon, 45th Field Hospital, la Haye du Puits.



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chocolate, an envelope with lemonade powder, and sometimes even a cigarette or two. These morsels allayed hunger pains for a few hours but were definitely no diet for a queasy stomach. After two such "meals," the crackers tasted like yeast, the cheese like leather, and the lemonade . . . well, here is what one Third Auxer had to say:

Without a daily shot of "C"  
The vitamin supreme,  
I guess our lives would only be  
A brief and sickly dream.

Coffee's good, and choc'late too,  
But lemonade's the stuff;  
If you want a solid brew,  
To make you rough and tough.

Yes, C-borne lemonade's the thing  
To make you really fight.  
You'll battle fiercely through the day  
And double-pace at night.

Don't throw away that package, chum,  
Don't sterilize your powder.  
With lemonade your fame will come  
As hero of the hour.

No wonder that Third Auxers started bartering for the produce of the land at the first opportunity. Normandy is famous for its cheese, its eggs, and its cider. Many farmers also made a delicious kind of bread, in comparison with which the American article was just so much tasteless dough. With a little ingenuity and a handy gasoline stove, any Third Auxer who felt so inclined could appoint himself team-cook and serve a dinner to make his fellows forget all their worries. The chore might take all afternoon, but the results would be a topic of conversation for weeks. After the devastating week at St. Lo, Captain D'Allesandro gave a dinner party that would have done justice to any French chef. The menu ran all the

way from *potage à la Third Aux* to *fruits et fromage*. Although a newcomer, he immediately became the most valuable member of his team.

It was at this time that Major Serbst endeared himself to the entire staff of the 13th Field Hospital by his quick action at Brécy. One day Serbst was walking down the road in search of eggs or a rasher of bacon, when he came upon a farmer who was driving a heifer to pasture, a rare sight in those days. In spite of his limited knowledge of French, Serbst immediately entered into negotiations for the purchase of the heifer. After repeated consultations with his dictionary, he finally settled on the price of two thousand francs or about forty dollars. The farmer drove the animal to the hospital, received payment, and bowed out of the picture.

The next day the animal was duly slaughtered, drawn, and quartered. Then came the break-through. No time for cooking. The carcass was thrown on a truck, the hospital packed up, and everybody concentrated on the dash for Paris. In this dash, the 13th Field Hospital moved ten times. At each bivouac the truck with the meat was either late in arriving or early in leaving. For weeks, Serbst did not even catch a glimpse of his property. In fact he forgot all about it. Finally the hospital was ordered to go into operation in the Belgian village of Aywaille. By this time, the men were down to cold spam and the mess officer was in dire straits. Came time to unload and Lord behold, there was the carcass, still in a fair state of preservation. The mess crew sprung into action, the meat was prepared, and the entire hospital staff ate its fill of juicy, if slightly rancid, roast beef. Serbst's reputation as an extra-curricular mess officer was established.

Next to eating, the main problem in the field was keeping clean. Here, the helmet did yeoman duty and a man was not considered full-fledged until he could shave his

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

whiskers, take a bath, and do his laundry, all out of the same helmet. Later, regular shower units appeared on the scene. These units would drive up, lay hose, heat water, install showers, put up screens, and be ready for the customers in less time than it takes to pitch a pup tent. Field hospitals, being farther towards the front than other hospitals, would see these units only occasionally. At such times word was quickly passed and the entire command would line up. Nurses took their turn. Most of them lost their enthusiasm for this *al fresco* showering however, when they realized that they were the objects of careful aerial observation by the cub plane pilots who would fly over, low and slow!

This indiscretion was mild compared with what happened later to some of the nurses who were bivouacked with the 102nd Evacuation Hospital in Huy during the Bulge. The hospital had set up in a school building which had a regular shower installation. Showers were as scarce as hen's teeth in those days. Many officers who were

traveling through Huy took advantage of the facilities at the 102nd. One of these (a Third Auxer whose name will be withheld) was in such a hurry that he neglected to consult the bathing schedule. Without the slightest notion of what he was getting into, he hied himself to the basement, opened the door to the shower room, and walked in. At this point, his glasses promptly steamed up and our friend proceeded to the middle of the room in a more or less blinded condition. Then he heard screams. Female screams! The man who tells this story does not say whether he just ran or whether he took off his glasses for a good look, but everybody can fill in this part according to his own imaginativeness. Suffice it to say that a guard was posted forthwith.

Field hospitals did their best work when the front was stable. In Normandy, they usually stayed in one location from one to two weeks. After one week, a hospital would be so full of severely ill patients that it took another week to make them all transportable. Abdominal patients especially could immobilize a hospital for many days. Since proper postoperative care was absolutely essential, one surgical team always had to stay behind when a hospital closed down. Occasionally special holding companies were used for this purpose. These companies however, had neither the personnel nor the equipment for the job. There was no way of circumventing the clean-up period.

One point that had given Third Auxers much concern before D Day was their relation to the field hospital personnel. In Sicily, this situation had been quite troublesome. In Normandy, the problem presented itself only once and then it was quickly straightened out. On the whole, the hospital officers did everything within their power to help the Third Auxers. They frequently assisted in the operating room.

As for extracurricular entertainment, field hospitals were at the bottom of the list.



Rusticating in Normandy: Boyden, Floyd, Chadwell, Jones, Shepherd, Privitera, Sutton.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

They were too small and too scattered to attract the shows that later toured the theater. Occasionally, during slack periods, Third Auxers journeyed to neighboring installations for a movie, a Bob Hope or Marlene Dietrich show. But such occasions were few and far between. Mostly, relaxation consisted of a round of poker, a supper of chips, or a walk through the country.

Sightseeing in Normandy was not a profitable diversion. The towns were razed, the farms deserted, the fields uprooted, the bridges blown, the roads chewed up. Along the coastal stretches, the Germans had planted thousands of poles to keep the gliders away. "Runstedt's asparagus patches" they were called and they made an ugly pattern, reminiscent of the barbed wire entanglements of the other war. The scars of battle were everywhere and the towns of Montebourg, Valognes, and Pont l'Abbé were so devastated that traffic was possible only over a narrow strip in the center of the street.

And yet, while the pall of battle still hung close, Frenchmen would return. Only a day after the fall of Pont l'Abbé a huge banner appeared on the street with the words BIENVENU AUX ALLIES! Captain Forgger passed through Montebourg a few

hours after the fighting had ceased. The town had literally collapsed. Not a house was intact. Waist-high debris filled the streets. Progress was possible only on foot. A French boy, no older than sixteen, was climbing to the top of one of the few walls still standing. At the risk of his life, he fastened the tricolor to the chimney. Forgger was touched. "Vive la France," he shouted to the boy in his precarious position. "Vive l'Amérique," was the answer. A Frenchman loves his native soil, even though it is just a ruin.

During most of the summer, the Third Aux was reinforced with teams from other auxiliary surgical groups, notably the Fourth and the First. The Fourth Aux teams were with the Group only for the first month. The First Aux supplied eight teams that joined during the latter part of June and stayed almost till the end of the war. Besides these, a number of teams were recruited from the general hospitals during the critical days before St. Lo. Colonel Crisler made it a policy to deploy all these extra teams at the evacuation hospitals rather than at the field hospitals, mainly because he was firmly convinced of the superiority of a four-man team. The net effect was that practically all field hospital surgery of First Army was done by Third Aux teams.

A team move in these early days was a slow and hazardous business. The danger arose from the fact that the front line was not always very clearly marked, either on the map or on the ground. More often than not, it was simply a place where nothing showed or moved. Sometimes sentries warned approaching traffic away. At other times there were no sentries. Then it was very easy to go astray. It happened to Lieutenant Sensenbach in Luxemburg and it almost happened to Major Church before St. Lo.

The *bocage* country of Normandy is criss-crossed by a great variety of roads, lanes,



Team No. 7 rests up: Balcom, Rosenberg, Bell, Anderson, Dahill, Stoller, Weisel.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

and paths. At intersections, three or four of these might all take off in the same general direction without any indication of which one led where. On this particular evening, Church was under orders to take his team to a new location, a scant ten miles away. The men left at night. Before they had gone half the distance, they were hopelessly lost. Church inquired of a patrol. It was no use. These men knew only their own sector and had no idea of what lay beyond. The Third Auxers could not even turn around and go back because the road by now was nothing but a few yards of black tar stretching away in the blackness of the night. The orders said to "proceed without delay." Proceed they did. They drove and stopped, drove and stopped, drove and stopped. Each time they became more confused.

Finally, just as dawn was beginning to break, the truck came upon a crossroad where a lone MP was rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"Where are we, corporal?" asked Church.

"Well, . . . I can't tell you exactly but the Krauts are just three hundred yards that-a way," was the laconic answer. And with that, the sentry pointed in the direction the truck was going!

That was enough. Swearing under his breath, Church ordered the driver to turn around, retreat, and wait for help. The men eventually got their bearings and reported for duty at the new station, ten hours after they left. It was a trip that could easily have brought them to disaster.

There was one other team that almost came to grief during the Cherbourg campaign and that was Major Graves'. His men were just finishing a run with the second platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital. The first platoon sent word that it was on the move and had been unable to take care of six non-transportable casualties in a field

near Quettetot. The commanding officer of the second platoon decided to send Major Graves' team to the trouble spot. The men started out on the afternoon of 23 June.

At Quettetot they found the six casualties in a deserted pasture. A lieutenant of the first platoon took his leave as soon as the relief party arrived. Third Auxers made a quick survey of the situation and went to work immediately. Of the six wounded, one was dying, another was transportable, but four needed operation right away. Supplies were unloaded, tables were set up, patients were prepared, and the operations got under way. For awhile, nobody had time to think of anything else.

At nightfall a French farmer approached the tent. He spoke no English but Major Graves spoke a little French and out of the halting conversation it became apparent that the region around Quettetot was infested with marauding Germans. The French farmer was applying for aid! At this point Graves



Sightseeing in Normandy was not a profitable diversion. This is Carentan.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

realized that, far from being able to protect the Frenchman, he could not even protect himself! All he had was a group of unarmed medics. What if a German soldier showed up? He could wipe out the whole hospital in a matter of minutes.

Nobody could be spared to go for help. With many misgivings, the Third Auxers finished their work, unrolled their sleeping bags, and tried to catch some sleep. Their rest lasted only a few hours. A band of Germans discovered the American ambulance and brought it under fire. Only the blackness of the night kept the tent from sharing the same fate. When daylight came, the Germans had dispersed but the ambulance was found riddled with bullet holes. If someone had used the vehicle for sleeping quarters (and this was a favorite trick), it would have meant certain death. Without waiting for any more French farmers to bring him bad news, Major Graves moved his party back to the second platoon. He had no desire to defend Quettetot.



Fixing the black-out entrance.

Cherbourg surrendered on 24 June but many isolated groups of Germans still held out. It was only with the capture of the Arsenal on 27 June that the city was cleared. Even after that, the outlying forts continued to fire. This is what Captain Foregger saw.

"Cherbourg was the first real city to be captured and we all wanted to see it. I caught a ride in a jeep. At Octeville the panorama began to unfold itself. We descended rapidly and in a few minutes entered the city. It wasn't much of a city and yet I was thrilled. After Montebourg and Valognes, any house looked good. The Germans had built a pillbox right in the middle of the main plaza. They had cleverly camouflaged it as a house, including painted-on windows. I wanted to see it and got out of the jeep. The interior was disappointing. Nothing but worn-out boots and helmets.

The harbor offered more excitement. The Krauts had done their usual thorough job of demolition. Every pier, every dock, every ship had been systematically dynamited. A large freighter blocked the entrance. Suddenly it started belching smoke. A Frenchman told me that it was a German time bomb. The bastards, I thought.

I continued to the Place de Napoléon where a crowd was gathering. Some sort of celebration was going on. Frenchmen were scurrying hither and yon. Workmen were erecting a big sign, the first word of which read VIVE. Troops of the 4th Division were lining up. A wave of excitement ran through the people. Suddenly they all started looking out towards the sea. I followed their gaze. Little puffs of smoke came from the forts on the jetty. Good God! Were they firing at us? Before I could decide, I heard airplanes. Out of the clouds they swooped. They peeled off one by one and dived straight for the forts. We could see

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

the bombs very plainly. Most of them fell in the water but one of them hit the target. There was a huge sheet of flame, a black column of smoke, and the masonry settled down into a shapeless pile. The Frenchmen began to shout, the band struck up a march, General Barton read his citations, and the workmen continued their job. I could hardly believe my eyes. Here was the war going on right under my nose and right under the noses of a thousand Frenchmen. Only the statue of Napoleon remained unmoved."

The fall of Cherbourg was a heavy blow to the Germans. Hitler had said that Cherbourg would resist all attempts at capture. He never dreamed that his vaunted legions would be overwhelmed and that the Americans would convert the beaches into great supply centers. These two miscalculations proved his undoing. On 25 June, less than

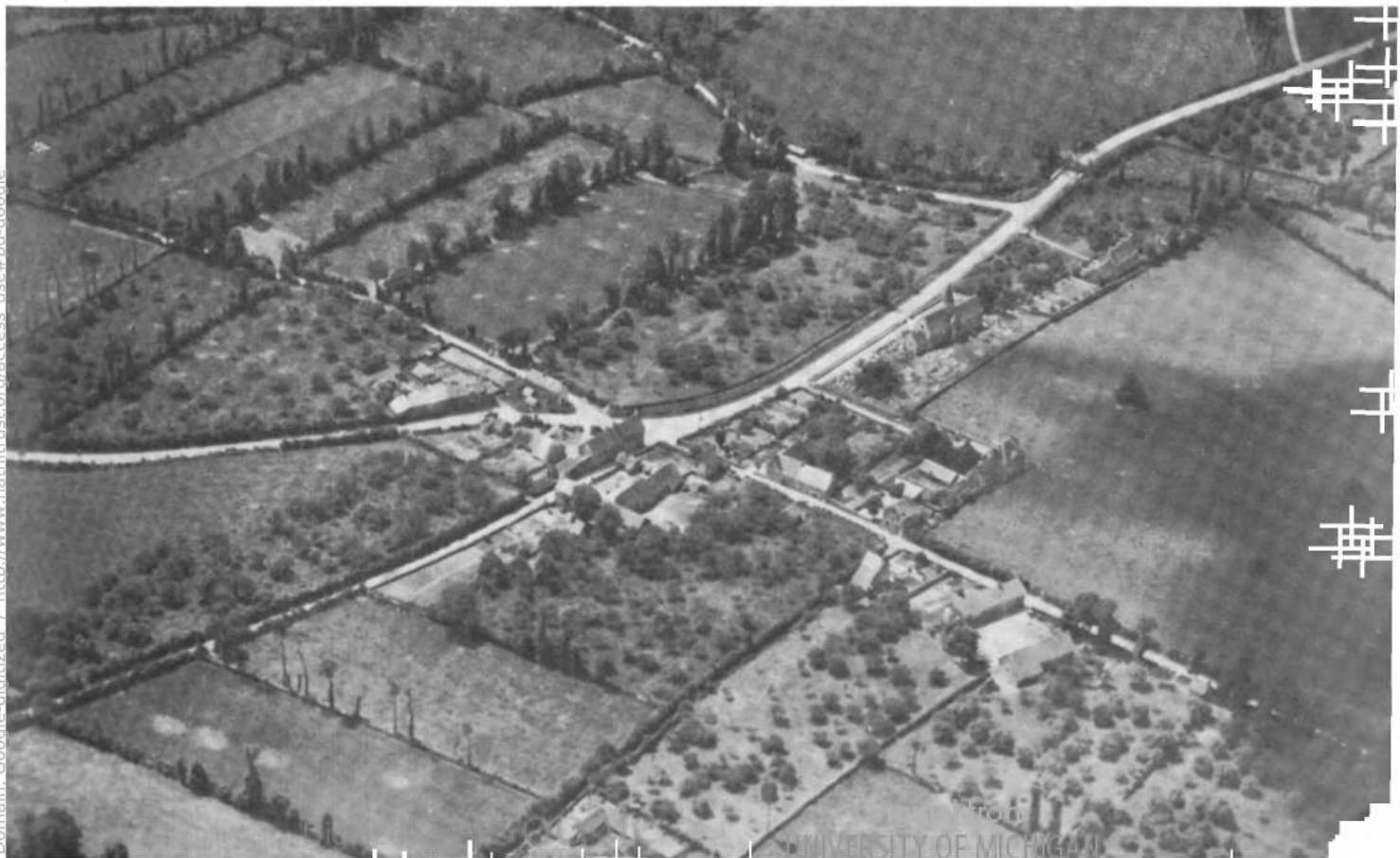
three weeks after D Day, the Americans had knocked Hitler's greatest boast out of his hands.

### *The Build-Up*

While VII Corps mopped up the Cherbourg peninsula, the major effort now shifted south where VIII Corps had been holding the line Carentan-Barnevile. It became the job of VIII Corps to seize the key points from which the break-through could be launched. These key points were La Haye du Puits and St. Lo.

The terrain at the base of the Cotentin was highly favorable to the defense and correspondingly unfavorable to the attack. Marshlands channeled the assault into narrow corridors within which the familiar pattern of small fields and numerous hedge-rows made the use of tanks impossible and forced the infantry into a costly frontal

The bocage country.



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attack. It was a slugging match in which the attackers were often pinned down for days on end.

Third Auxers could always tell when a big offensive got under way because of the preliminary artillery barrage which would invariably pass directly over their heads. So it was that the teams around St. Sauveur le Vicomte were awakened early in the morning of 3 July by a terrific cannonading that lasted fully an hour. It marked the jump-off of three divisions for La Haye du Puits. The town was taken, lost, and re-taken. It finally came into American hands for good on 7 July. This attack ground to a halt at Lessay.

The next push was aimed at St. Lo, a name that will live forever. While VII Corps engaged the enemy to the northwest, the 29th and 35th Division converged on the doomed town. In a week of savage fighting the Americans gradually dislodged the Germans but it took tons of bombs and tons of shells. When the first American troops entered St. Lo on 18 July, they saw little more than a pile of rubble.

Meanwhile the Omaha sector had been relatively quiet. Here the brunt of the fight-

ing was carried on by the British and the Canadians who finally succeeded in seizing Caen on 9 July. Caen now was the pivot from which the line ran north to the sea and west to Lessay.

The week following the capture of St. Lo was one of ominous quiet. On the surface it seemed that the Germans had contained the beachhead but in reality they were teetering all along the front. Nowhere did the enemy have the strength for an effective counter-attack. Rommell was seriously wounded. Von Rundstedt was recalled. The Germans were leaderless.

The period from 25 June to 25 July was one of intense activity for the Third Aux. As the month of July advanced, the pressure shifted from the western end to the eastern end of the line. The greatest burden fell on the men in front of St. Lo. Casualties at this point far exceeded expectations and the teams were deluged. The ordinary twelve-hour shift was extended to twenty-four hours and then to thirty-six hours. Some of the more rugged men even managed to keep going forty-eight hours without rest but this represented the end-point of human endurance.

A common sight.



## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

Third Aux teams faced several major crises during the course of the war. The early days on the beachhead belong in this category and so do the battle for Montebourg, the carnage at St. Lo, the counter-attack at Mortain, the nightmare of the Hürtgen Forest, and the Battle of the Bulge. The physical stress and strain, the mental fatigue and anguish of such periods cannot be described. They are locked up within each man. Every Third Auxer gave all he had and reaped his own rewards, regardless of whether he came home with a decoration.

The month of July brought an important change to Headquarters. On the 24th, Colonel Lodmell was replaced by Colonel Crisler. A well-known Memphis surgeon, Colonel Crisler had the qualities that are needed in a commanding officer: keen insight, courteous dignity, and unflagging energy. Third Auxers respected him from the time they first met him in Stourport.

### *The Break-Through*

Since the beginning of July, plans had been under way for a decisive thrust which

would break out of the beachhead and give room to maneuver. This was operation COBRA.

Bad weather caused a week's delay but on 25 July, things began to move. The assault was launched over a narrow front west of St. Lo by VII Corps, reinforced to four infantry divisions and two armored divisions. First came a saturation bombing of unheard-of proportions. Concentrating on a strip four miles long and a mile and a half wide, 1500 heavy bombers laid a pattern averaging ten bombs to the acre. Some of the bombs were released prematurely and killed hundreds of Americans, including General McNair. But the enemy fared far worse. Stunned by the ferocity of the attack, he reeled. At the end of the first day, the infantry had opened a gap five miles wide and two miles deep.

This was what the armored divisions were waiting for. On 26 July, the 3rd Armored and the 1st Infantry Motorized poured through the breach and headed southwest. On 27 July the situation had become very fluid. The enemy was being pressed back at many points. On 28 July Coutances fell and the resistance around Lessay and Periers

**The docks at Cherbourg. It took a long time before the Allies could use them.**



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

disintegrated. On 29 July the advance continued in a southwesterly direction. Disregarding pockets of resistance along the coast, the 4th Armored now made its spectacular dash for Brittany. Avranches fell on 29 July and the whole western shoulder of the German line crumbled. The gamble had been won.

Although the German western flank had given way entirely, his eastern flank was still intact. This contained the bulk of his armored divisions. Reinforcements continued to arrive and to engage the British and the Canadians southeast of Caen. Retreating German divisions from the western flank were side-slipping to the southeast so that on 6 August the front ran in a curving line from Caen through Vire to Mortain. South of Barenton there was no organized resistance.

The one German hope of avoiding complete disaster was the reconstitution of a

new front with its western flank anchored on the sea. The last point at which this could be done was Avranches. Hitler sent instructions that Avranches was to be taken at all costs. The German commanders concentrated five armored divisions for the greatest counterattack of the war with the exception of the Bulge.

At the start of this counteroffensive, the 30th Infantry Division was holding the Germans at Mortain, gateway to Avranches. Halfway between Mortain and Avranches, a platoon of the 47th Field Hospital had set up at the hamlet of Refueville. It was staffed by the teams of Graves and Higginbotham. The hospital was pitched on the high ground east of the village and overlooked miles and miles of rolling country, dotted with beautiful woods and lush fields. This was the edge of the *bocage* country. The fields were a little larger than around St. Lo but they were still surrounded by hedges

St. Lo was wiped off the face of the earth.



## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

and covered with the crops of the season. The weather had taken a turn for the better and the Third Auxers reveled in the sight of the church steeples, the clustered houses, and the scattered farms that made up Riveville.

The attack came on 7 August. In a day of savage fighting, the Germans retook the town of Mortain. The 30th Division suffered heavily and many of the casualties could not be reached because German armor fanned out beyond the town. One American battalion was isolated on the hills east of Mortain and held out during the entire five days of the battle. If it had not been for this heroic defense, the Germans might have been successful in carrying out their designs. As it was, they came close. Tanks penetrated as far as Juvigny le Tertre and on 10 August were within one mile of Riveville.

At the hospital, the stream of casualties mounted alarmingly. Third Auxers made a valiant attempt to keep up but on 9 August the situation had grown out of hand.



General Rogers decorates Colonel Crisler.

The backlog had risen to 16 patients. It was more than two teams could handle. Graves called for help. The next morning, the teams of Zeiders and Hurwitz arrived. They went to work immediately.

On the evening of 10 August the operating room was going full blast. A second tent had been pressed into service and four operations were going on simultaneously. Major Zeiders was starting an operation for the removal of a foreign body near the heart. Graves was making notes at a table in the center of the tented area. But he could not concentrate on his task. Something made him get up and saunter over to the nearest vantage point. He wanted to see how Zeiders was getting along.

Suddenly, there was a sharp report, like a crack of thunder. The tent poles swayed under a violent rush of air. Everybody sensed disaster. People looked at each other. There was a minute of ominous silence.

One of the nurses from the postoperative ward rushed in, wiping blood from her neck. An enlisted man from the hospital platoon held up his helmet. It showed two clean holes. Graves glanced over towards the table where he had been sitting. His fat, leather-bound diary was torn to shreds!

Again the air was torn asunder. The operating tent was pierced in a dozen places. The steel table of the x-ray machine was pierced. Everyone realized that the hospital had been bracketed. Everyone knew that it was just a matter of minutes until the third shell found its mark. The patients in the postoperative tent became hysterical. At the front, a man could at least find cover. Here, he was defenseless. Consternation changed to gripping fear. But the third shell never came.

Two days before, the Germans had taken aerial photographs with magnesium flares. On these photographs, the hospital tents showed very plainly but their red crosses

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did not. German tank commanders studied the photographs, spotted the tents, and fired two rounds. The shells landed about fifteen yards from the entrance to the receiving tent. Thousands of fragments showered the area. Every tent was damaged. Many trucks were hit. And yet, the only casualty was the platoon nurse who suffered a superficial flesh wound of the neck. The next morning, all the nurses and one Third Aux team were evacuated.

For the skeleton crew that remained behind, the next few days were filled with anxiety. Now it became evident how unwise it was to dispense with foxholes. Third Auxers immediately corrected the situation. The result was a series of excavations to do justice to a professional well-digger. Some of the holes had camouflaged roofs and padded walls. One of them was so deep that its occupant had to have a ladder to get in and out. It was love's labor lost. The Germans were already on the run.

What made the Germans run was a combination of American bombers and rein-

forcements from the 29th Division. Presently, there came a new threat to hasten the Nazi retreat. This was the wheeling movement against Argentan which culminated in the Falaise pocket. The Germans recognized the danger of their extended position and they were still further discomfited by the fresh Allied landings on the south coast of France. The Mortain salient disappeared as rapidly as it had formed. Hitler was furious.

The fighting now rapidly shifted to the east. The Falaise pocket was next. With the British-Canadian forces advancing from the north and the American First Army from the west, the Germans were driven into a trap. The noose was laid on 10 August when First Army turned north from Le Mans and attacked towards Alencon. On 15 August these troops reached Argentan. During the next four days the Germans made a desperate effort to keep their escape route open and some of their divisions did get away but on 19 August the Canadians and the Americans came together at Chambois and the once-

The gaunt ruins of Vire.



## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

proud Seventh German Army was annihilated. This sealed the fate of the entire German garrison in France.

### *The dash across France and Belgium*

Third Auxers now turned their attention to the east where the advances were measured in dozens of miles instead of by the mile. Progress was so rapid that it was hard to follow it. Chartres fell on 15 August, Dreux on 16 August, Orleans on 17 August. Two days later, the 79th Division crossed the Seine at Mantes. On 23 August, First Army had swept around Paris and was moving in a northeasterly direction at unprecedented speed. The front had moved some two hundred miles in two weeks!

For Third Auxers, these weeks were mostly a time of relaxation. It was impossible to keep hospitals close to the front and there was little to do but relax in the sun, catch up on sleep, see the sights, and "cement

relationships." August was the only month when the weather was consistently good and Third Auxers made the most of their opportunity. For the first time they had a chance to look around, and the numerous road signs of the Touring Club de l'Ouest guided their steps. Mont St. Michiel, St. Malo, Bagnoles de l'Orne, these were all international tourist-attractions.

Viewed from a distance, Mont St. Michiel looks like a fantastic medieval castle, rising sheer out of the placid waters of the English Channel. Actually, it is a small village with quaint houses hugging the steep slopes that culminate in the abbey at the top. A causeway connects the island with the mainland and as battle-weary Third Auxers drove over this causeway, they were gradually transported to a different world, a world so far away from the sordid scenes at the field hospitals that it seemed beyond imagination. Here was a bit of historic France perched on a rock and untouched by the war. Here is what one Third Auxer had to say about it.

German Tiger tank at Juvigny le Tertre.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

"Books have been written about Mont St. Michiel and if I had the same ability as the authors, I would give you a faithful account of everything we saw. But we did not see Mont St. Michiel with the eyes of a peace-time scholar who goes there to absorb the rich flavor. What fascinated us most was that we saw normal French people live normal, peaceful lives. Of course, we did make the pilgrimage to the statue of Joan of Arc, and we studied the quiet majesty of the Gothic archways, and we visited the museum with its musty relics, and we climbed the footpath to the top of the promontory, but the real high spot came when we sat down on the spacious veranda at Mère Poulard's and ordered our dinner of omelet, roast beef, cheese, and wine, just like ordinary tourists. Yes, war is a business of startling contrasts. Only a week before, we were slugging it out amid the gunk and gore of the most dreadful wounds."

Sightseeing was not an unmixed pleasure however, because trucks and jeeps simply

are not made for comfort. Peggy Baker was the only one to beat that hazard. Jokingly she had asked a visiting infantry colonel if he could get her "one of those nice German jeeps." The colonel mumbled something in his beard and Peggy promptly forgot all about her jeep. Imagine her surprise, when a few days later, the colonel drove up in a classy Mercedes with amphibious chassis, streamlined fenders, balloon tires, and propeller at the rear! A product of German ingenuity, this vehicle could negotiate roads and rivers with equal facility. It provided many moments of relaxation and hilarity before it had to be jettisoned along with many other valuable mementos that would not fit in a barracks bag.

While some German equipment was thus ahead of American, most of it fell far short. Third Auxers were astonished to see many dead horses by the side of wrecked German vehicles. French farmers supplied the answer. These horses had been requisitioned to pull everything from field kitchens to light artillery. Amazing as it seemed, a German division on the move in the year 1944 needed more than eight hundred horses!

A typical Normandy forest.



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## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

Lieutenant Sensenbach, who had a first-hand view of German methods during his nine months of captivity, put it well. "Sure, the Germans had marvelous equipment. It was marvelous by *European* standards. The only trouble was that the Americans had twice as much."

After the middle of August, speculation ran rife about the fate of Paris. The liberation of this city was but one dramatic incident in the general thrust northeastward, but in those days it was considered symbolic of the liberation of all France. Tension mounted as news from the beleaguered city filtered through. Every day provided exciting moments. On 14 August, de Gaulle called for a national resistance movement. Isolated skirmishes broke out in Paris. German efforts to round up the patriots only made matters worse. The Paris police declared a strike which was the prelude to a general insurrection. On 19 August, fighting was in full swing and the patriots gained control of the center of the city. After four days, a truce was arranged and the world prematurely celebrated the news that Paris was free. But the truce failed to hold and the hard-pressed partisans needed outside help.

This placed the Allied commanders in a dilemma. Serious fighting for Paris would tie up forces that were urgently needed elsewhere. Yet, it was difficult to leave the patriots to their fate. The decision was made to intervene. The French 2nd Armored Division and the American 4th Infantry Division were directed to advance on the city. The French came from the west, the Americans from the south. For an eyewitness account of what took place, let us turn to a group of lucky Third Auxers.

Paris was not exactly what we had expected it to be on that fateful 25 August. If we had known that we would get there before our own troops and that we would get shot at on the Rue de Versailles, we might

not have started so lightheartedly. But we did not know it and so our casual excursion turned swiftly into high adventure. It was high adventure because it combined in the short space of one day all the elements of a thriller: surprise, excitement, risk, suspense, drama, and triumph. For those twenty-four hours, we were part of a train of events that held us spellbound and when it was all over, we had witnessed a spectacle of historic significance. That spectacle was Paris on the day the Fighting French stormed the last German bastions. To see that, we would risk our necks again.

It was on 23 August that we first got our wild idea. On that day the Free French radio broadcast from the Parvis of Notre Dame that the partisans were gaining the upper hand in their battle with the German garrison. True, the announcer said nothing about American or British troops in the city, and his eloquent oratory was interrupted frequently by shots but we paid little attention to such details and assumed that the city had finally been rid of its oppressors. Paris



Mont St. Michel had lost none of its flavor.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

on the greatest day of its history! Paris, the gayest, the most glamorous city of all Europe! What could be more exciting than to see it at the height of its deliverance?

Immediately we launched into a discussion of how to get there. The only vehicle that we could get our hands on was the surgical truck. Not that it was particularly adapted to a reconnaissance mission of that sort. But we quickly rationalized. Had we not seen bulldozers scurrying over the boulevards of Cherbourg while the bombs were still falling? And should we not take surgical supplies to the hospitals, provisions to the civilians, and succor to the wounded? Moreover, the very bulkiness of our conveyance (so we reasoned) would allay the suspicions of meddlesome MP's. In short, when we had finished the planning stage, we would not have exchanged our eight-ton colossus for the slickest jeep in the world. Events proved us right. When the bullets started flying, our vehicle commanded respect from friend and enemy alike.

We stocked up with prudence aforesought. The van needed streamlining. No longer was it to be just a mobile operating

room. On this trip, it might have to function as observation post, field kitchen, sleeping quarters, and dressing station. We went over it with a critical eye. Rations, blankets, stoves, cigarettes, everything but the emergency latrine. We had never needed one before.

Friday 25 August dawned a bright and sunny day, the kind of day that makes nature smile. There was a tang in the air and we embarked on our adventure with a zest worthy of a more legitimate object. "We," in this case meant the team: Foot-loose, inquisitive, alert Cliff Graves. Quiet, studious soft-spoken Elphege Beaudreault. Restless, impulsive, quick thinking Claude Warren. Wily, deliberate, smart Dick Foregger. Good fellows all. And then of course the drivers: Vaudelle Lewis and Neil Horn. Steady, dependable GI's.

So high was our spirit of anticipation that at first we had little eye for the country we rode through: dense, unspoiled forests, lush fields, occasional ridges with sweeping views. Even the little towns failed to excite our curiosity. We had gotten used to their ruined houses, their evil smells, and their

One thing that amazed Third Auxers was the dead horses.



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## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

sad inhabitants. So preoccupied were we that we failed to return the arm-wavings of the occupants of an *école pour jeunes filles*. Today we had other things on our mind. At Alencon we stopped for a lunch of K rations. Then we began to give serious thought to our surroundings.

By this time we had left the hills of the Cotentin well behind and found ourselves on the fertile farm-lands of Eure et Loire. Instead of the crater-pocked fields of Normandy we were now seeing the practically untouched bread-basket of France where the Germans had not "elected to make a stand." Not only were the fields and farm-houses unscathed, but even the highway became strangely peaceful, in sharp contrast to the jammed roads of Normandy. The significance of this did not dawn on us until later. For the time being, we became wholly absorbed in the laughing landscape that unfolded itself before us. In the endless rows of wheat sheaves, yellow in the blazing sun. In the graceful, slender steeples, jutting up from clumps of trees. In the creaking horse-drawn wagons, hauling wheat and hay and corn. In the waving rows of beech trees leading off to stately manors. In the neat and well-trimmed orchards, trees ablaze with ripening fruit. In the narrow, little by-paths, curving, winding, dipping, rising. France, la belle France.

But where were our troops? We had fancied to be part of a great wave of American military might. Instead of that, we were hurrying along a completely deserted highway with only here and there a sign of recent battle: a strafed German staff car, a charred Tiger tank, a side-swept *Truppenwagen*. As we got farther east, the only change in this pattern was that the derelicts would now be standing in the middle of the road instead of lying in the ditch. Evidently, the wreckers had not gotten this far yet. Still, we had no eye for anything but our goal. Wasn't Paris at the end of the road?

We were still some twenty-five miles from our destination when we were stopped by a gendarme. Monsieur would pardon the delay but it was his duty to inform us that the road to Paris was being crossed at unpredictable times by retreating Germans. As far as he knew there had been no trouble in the past few hours, but only this morning an American captain had been shot in his jeep, *là-bas*. And then, there were mines. He showed me on the map. *Ici*. Of course, if Monsieur wants to take chance and go on his own risk . . . .

A sudden pall settled on our spirits. Jerry troops. Land mines. Robot tanks. Booby traps. Eighty-eights. Snipers. We had gone through all that before and we were not anxious to renew the acquaintance. But damn it, we had gone a long way to get this far. We had driven a hundred miles. We had the wherewithal. We were just beginning to taste success. We had . . . . well, there were a number of reasons. To turn back now would be to admit defeat. We debated.

We collared a civilian. "Paris? Mais non, c'est impossible!"

We stopped a jeep with two GI's from the 4th Division, the first Americans we had seen since noon. "We are heading south. It's a no-man's land between here and Paris."

We spied a GI truck, coming out of a side road. "Paris? I don't think you can make it. My buddy tried it but he had to turn back."

They all had their own version. So did our gang. Elphege was for turning back. Dick urged going on. Claude was on the fence. Lewis and Horn just looked at me. I was on the spot.

Ten minutes later we pushed off. This was the one time when we just had to take a chance, the one exploit we would be telling our grandchildren about. The hell with

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the Boche. Now or never. Paris, here we come!

It would be difficult to describe our state of mind during that next hour. We felt like a bomber crew over Berlin, except more jumpy because we had nothing to shoot back with. Nothing but our great big van that presented a target nobody could miss. We drove cautiously, staying well on the left side of the road and scanning the horizon at every bend. But we saw nothing. It was the most deserted road I have ever seen.

I had marked the mined area on my map. It was at a fork in the road. An unexploded robot-tank was partly hidden in the grass of the verge. Across from it was the remains of a gas station with a huge sign, half down, announcing the supreme excellence of *Huiles Renault*. As if anybody cared! But I shall always remember that spot for the *Huiles Renault*. The gendarme had said: "Take the right branch." We did. It led us straight into Versailles.

And now, a few miles before the Paris suburb, we finally began to see some human beings again, but they were not the American soldiers we were looking for. Instead, they were French cyclists who would dismount as soon as they saw us and wave madly. It did seem a bit over-enthusiastic but then, the French are known to be a demonstrative people and perhaps they were merely fascinated by the dimensions of our vehicle. At any rate, we lost no opportunity to wave back just as enthusiastically, if not as gracefully. For the next few minutes we were completely absorbed in this game which became more interesting as we saw more and more good-looking girls in the crowd. This was a cinch. Why hadn't we thought of going to Paris before?

There was a sharp bend in the road and then a barricade. The next thing we saw was a long row of tanks, guns pointing towards Versailles, crews ready for action, machine guns deployed behind trees. An

officer in American battle dress but with French insignia held up his hand and addressed us with typical Gallic urbanity. This was a tank battalion of the French Force of the Interior (the so-called F.F.I.) with instructions to intercept an escaping regiment of German infantry that was being chased in this direction. Of course it was possible that the Germans would disperse or change their course in the next hour, but the instructions had been specific and anyone entering Versailles from this side did so at his own risk. "Naturally we are delighted to see the Americans here at such a critical time, and especially *la grande voiture chirurgicale . . .* Really, Monsieur should not take these Germans too seriously. They had already been pushed out of the suburbs and were about to give up any time now. Alors, Paris is being freed by the Parisians themselves, n'est ce pas? C'est formidable." Etc. etc. etc.

There we were. Within ten miles of Paris but separated from it by a column of Germans! How utterly exasperating. How completely disheartening. And this situation might not change for twenty-four hours or longer. What were we to do meanwhile? Stay here? Turn back? Continue in the face of German opposition? This called for some careful deliberation.

We deliberated. We looked at it from all sides but we got no further. There were the same pros and cons as before. Only, this time we were even closer to our goal. We cast about for an inspiration. We looked at the grim cannon, the silent tanks, the alert soldiers, the road which had suddenly lost all its traffic. But wait, had it really? What was this coming towards us now? So help me. Two Americans in a jeep.

It was a major of the Quartermaster Corps and his driver. They had no more business being there than we, but they were considerably better prepared because the major had a gun. They had arrived by a different route

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

and they had their minds set on getting to Paris. So we put our heads together and made a *plan de campagne*. We would continue towards Versailles, the major in his jeep in front, we at a sufficient distance to have some protection from his gun and yet far enough behind to allow a quick retreat, should the necessity arise. For the rest, we had to trust to luck. Alons, mes enfants. Paris est là-bas.

The next hour was undoubtedly the most exciting of our lives. It saw us through a tremendous ovation in Versailles, a street fight under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, and back again to Versailles for a reception such as only the French can put on. Gradually we pieced the story together. Once we had done that, we could look back and understand everything perfectly.

On 25 August, Parisian partisans had been fighting the German garrison for almost a week and they had done so without any outside help whatever. With superb courage and improvised equipment, they had erected street barricades, engaged tanks, and disrupted communications. As the days wore on, these battles increased in ferocity because the French, tasting revenge, became bolder and bolder, while the Germans were infuriated at being mauled by an underground army, and severely mauled at that. As one would expect in such a situation, the French suffered heavy losses at first, but they carried on magnificently in the belief that they were soon to be joined by the Americans. Always, at the most critical moments, word had gone around: "Stand fast. Hold on. The Americans will soon be here." The longer the French waited, the higher went their hopes. Even on 25 August, when the battle for Paris reached its climax, Versailles had seen no Americans and so it was that we, *we* in our unarmed, clandestine, runaway vehicle were looked upon as the American Army, the conquering heroes, "ces

braves Yankees" who were chasing the Boche from the most sacred ground in France!

These were the things we learned later. But, at the moment we approached Versailles, we were completely unaware of them and we were utterly unprepared for the reception that awaited us. As soon as we passed the famous Palace, we were confronted by a milling, cheering, frenzied multitude that mobbed our truck and stopped us dead in our tracks. Men ran out with bottles of champagne; women handed us their babies to be kissed; girls clambered up with autograph books; boys hoisted themselves on the radiator, into the cab, even on the top of the truck. It was the most spontaneous, the most sincere, the most moving demonstration that we shall ever see and it produced an electrifying effect on us. To understand it, one must understand the French people, suppressed, enslaved, humiliated for four long years and now suddenly set free, like a bird let out of its cage.

We Americans have no conception of the suffering and the indignities of those four years. We could only see the mute evidence of it here and there. In the theater signs: Germans only. In the food dumps, gathered while Paris starved. In the proclamations threatening death to anyone caught on the street at night. In the piles of civilian property, hastily requisitioned and just as hastily abandoned. In the violent outbursts wherever German prisoners appeared on the streets. In the dumb-struck Jewish people, many of them still wearing their badge: Juif. But most of all we could see it in the faces of the people who lined our route. Eager, animated, jubilant faces, all of them expressing the wildest joy. Never will we forget them. It was the Gallic spirit in one great explosive outpouring. We were seeing the French people in their greatest moment.

So this was Versailles. What would Paris be like? We must find out and so we disengaged ourselves from the general tumult and

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continued through the beautiful but deserted Bois de Sèvres towards the Seine. I tried to form a picture of what awaited us by questioning three gendarmes who had asked to ride with us. They said that they were being sent to reinforce the partisans in Paris. A dozen ambulances were marooned in a section that had been cut off by barricades. Were we going in to relieve these? I was just going to ask them if we were supposed to charge the barricades with the *grande voiture* when I caught my first glimpse of the Eiffel Tower and the sight was so impressive, it silenced me.

Even on an ordinary day, Paris is a sight that will silence anyone. On 25 August 1944, it was more than that. It was a revelation. Pregnant with the spirit of a nation reborn, Paris down below us became an awesome spectacle that made us see the mighty stream of history. We were part of that history. For a long time, no one said a word.

We crossed the river at the Pont de Sèvres. The avenue was lined with handsome, modernistic apartment houses, most of them flying the tricolor, but the pavement was littered with debris and there were no people about. At the Porte de St. Cloud we circled

slowly, feeling our way and heading up the Avenue de Versailles which had a more normal appearance. Again, crowds began to appear and again there was applause, cheering, tossing of flowers, and waving of flags. But this time we tried to discourage all this because we did not wish to attract the attention of snipers. If we had known that at this very moment there was fierce fighting on the Place de la Concorde, that tanks were charging the Chambre de Députés, and that the Grand Palais had just been set on fire by the Germans, we would have been more cautious yet because all these places were just around the corner.

Suddenly, shots rang out. Pedestrians scurried in all directions. A figure lay slumped on the sidewalk, half a block away. Carloads of partisans, guns ablaze, whizzed by. Gendarmes posted themselves in the middle of the street. We got out and questioned them.

"Oui Monsieur. German snipers are firing on the crowd. Reinforcements will be here soon. Barricades are already being manned." And again that same supreme disdain for the Boche: "Really, it is nothing, Monsieur. There are only a few Germans here (Paris

An American-made tank manned by the F.F.I. enters Paris.



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newspapers the next day mentioned 40,000). On vous demande. Veuillez continuer." And he made a gesture in the direction of the river.

We scanned the street. There was nothing extraordinary to be seen. The major in his jeep said that he would make a reconnaissance. We waited. Five minutes later he came back as if chased by a thousand devils. Caught in a crossfire of machine guns, he had escaped only because his jeep would turn corners faster than bullets. As he finished talking, shots rang out again. Glass fell in front of us. There was no use stretching our luck. We had had enough.

Considerably faster than we had come, we now retraced our course across the Seine and back to Versailles. When we got there, we found the town in even greater excitement than before. Word had spread like wildfire that the Americans had arrived and when these people, who had welcomed us only an hour before, now saw us return, they immediately decided that we were going to make Versailles our Headquarters. Nothing was further from our minds. All we wanted was something to eat and a place to sleep. We got both plus a civic celebration.

Wherever we went, crowds were already awaiting us. A clean-faced, blue-eyed partisan of seventeen, who carried his gun with an *aplomb* that belied his age, conducted us to the Hotel de Richeau where we sat down to the best dinner that Versailles had to offer while the proprietor fought vainly at the door to keep the crowds away. After dinner we met the town notables, mainly members of the resistance movement, shook hands with hundreds of lesser lights, and kissed untold numbers of charming girls. There was singing and speech making and toasting and news-exchanging and well-wishing and merrymaking until it was quite impossible to distinguish the popping of champagne bottles at the bar from the

fusillades on the street where the Jerry-hunt went on all night.

The next morning Paris newspapers ran the story with unvarying eloquence, if varying accuracy. I quote from *L'Aube*.

### ACCUEIL DELIRANT DES AMERICAINS A VERSAILLES

A 19 h. 25, dans le tonnerre des canons, une grande voiture américaine bousculait de Versailles les derniers éléments allemands qui partaient au désordre le long de la voie du métro. A 19 h. 30, à quelques mètres du P. C., à travers les barricades et entre les groupes ennemis, le commandant Clifford L. Graves de New York City et de l'armée des Etats-Unies, avec plusieurs autres officiers américains, accompagnés du capitaine Girardin, chargé de mission par le Comité médical de la Résistance, arrivaient devant la Mairie de Versailles. Une foule en délire, le mot n'est pas trop fort, se rassemblait en quelques instants . . . .

La grande voiture qui les avait amenée était couverte de fleurs et de drapeaux aux couleurs alliées . . . . Le premier soin du commandant Graves a été de se mettre en rapport avec les services médicaux français pour s'enquérir des besoins de la population française en médicaments . . . .

Une réception fut organisée sous les rafales de mitrailleuses et tout près du canon par M. Sergetan, maire de Versailles, en présence des principaux membres de la résistance et centaines d'autres . . . .

\* \* \*

### DELIRIOUS RECEPTION OF THE AMERICANS AT VERSAILLES

At 7:20 P.M., while the cannon still rumbled, a large American vehicle knocked the last remaining German elements out of Versailles and made them retreat in disorder along the tracks of the subway. At 7:30, only a few meters from the C.P., across the

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

barricades and while the enemy still held many outposts in the vicinity, Major Clifford L. Graves of New York City and the U. S. Army, together with several other American officers arrived in front of the town hall of Versailles. He was accompanied by Captain Girardin who is in charge of the Medical Committee of the Resistance Movement. A delirious crowd, the word is not too strong, assembled in a few minutes . . . .

The great vehicle which brought them was covered with flowers and the flags of the United Nations . . . . The first act of Major Graves was to put himself in touch with the French medical services and inquire into the medical needs of the French population.

A reception was organized practically under the spark of the machine guns and the muzzle of the cannon by Monsieur Sergetan, mayor of Versailles, in the presence of the principal members of the Resistance Movement and hundreds of others . . . .

\* \* \*

Little did I think when I first started working on mobile surgical units that my *grande voiture* would knock the last remaining German elements out of Versailles. When I think of it now, it still seems like a dream. But it is no dream to the American soldiers who fell to make it come true and whose wounds I know too well. The tribute we received was meant for them. May they rest in the knowledge that their sacrifice has not been in vain.

The next day Paris woke up, a free city once more. The last German bastions had fallen at eight o'clock the previous evening although fighting did not cease for many hours after that. The newspapers told us what had been going on at the time we were caught in the fire on the Rue de Versailles. While the suburbs had been fairly well

cleaned out by then, the Germans were putting up a desperate last-ditch resistance in their strongholds around the Place de la Concorde which is the Times Square of Paris. These strongholds included such famous buildings as the Hotel Crillon, the Senate Building, the Chambre des Députés, the Kommandantur on the Place de l'Opéra, and the Jardins de Luxembourg. As late as seven o'clock (which is just about the time we would have gotten there, had we not turned back), the Germans opened fire from the top of the Arc de Triomphe and turned the Champs Elysées into a shambles. They had posted their machine guns on the housetops whence they could be dislodged only by heroic means. Here is a typical story told to me by a French girl who witnessed it from beginning to end.

Friday noon, six German soldiers demanded entry to the apartment house where she and her mother made their home. The soldiers barricaded themselves in a top-floor room and opened fire on the crowds in the street below. You might wonder why the people dared show themselves during this phase of the hostilities. Fact of the matter is that they got a terrific bang out of seeing the Germans rooted out. They would risk their lives to be present. I have already said how the street would fill with civilians five minutes after the shooting stopped. Well, so it was here. All afternoon, partisans tried to smoke the Jerries out, but without success. Finally, a white flag appeared at the window. A partisan advanced, only to fall under a volley of shots before he had taken a dozen steps. This too was not uncommon. The Germans defend such tactics on the ground that the partisans were really only armed civilians and therefore had no military status. Naturally, the populace became enraged. Then, someone got hold of a bazooka which blasted a hole in the wall large enough to put a piano through. Then the mob (it was pretty much a free-for-all by

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

now) rushed the house and lynched the survivors by throwing them to the street below.

At the Grand Palais, as fine a building as Paris has, the Germans started a fire by sending a burning tank towards its walls. At the Senate building, it took tanks to dislodge them. At the Hotel Crillon, they seized hostages and tried to get away by having the hostages walk out in front. But the best story comes from the Kommandantur, the German General Headquarters in Paris. The high-ranking officers here put up only a token resistance and then sent out word that they were ready to surrender, but only to soldiers, not to partisans. When this did not work, they slowly came out, each one loaded down with as much of the accumulated loot of four years as he could carry. Arrived on the street, they had the crust to sit down on their suitcases and demand transportation to a place of safety! The crowd just

howled at that. Quickly the generals became separated from their suitcases and were made to march down the Rue de la Paix in custody of the partisans. To appreciate the full ignominy of this, one must know that the partisans for the most part were just boys of seventeen and eighteen with only an armband to identify their military status. The spectacle of von Choltitz' clique marching down the street in the hands of such "franc-tireurs" must have been a supreme gratification to the Parisians.

Such was the Paris we entered on Saturday morning. Once again we crossed the Seine, once more we reached the Rue de Versailles, but this time there were no shots, only crowds and crowds of Frenchmen in their most colorful costumes. It was a day such as Paris had not seen in all its history and the Parisians have not forgotten how to be gay, I can assure you of that.

The crowd howled.



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Everything cooperated to make the spectacle glittering. The sun shone brightly from a cloudless sky. Every house, almost every window sported a flag, be it the Tricolor, the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, or the Hammer and Sickle. Sidewalk cafes were jammed from early morning till late at night with laughing, gesticulating, voluble Frenchmen who could speak their minds once more. Crowds gathered at every intersection to cheer the military vehicles or hoot the small groups of German prisoners that were still being rounded up. Every F.F.I. tank had at least one good-looking girl perched on the turret. Loudspeakers in the street resounded with the Marseillaise, the Star Spangled Banner, or God Save the King at every opportunity. Hundreds of bicycles, their metal frames painted in flamboyant colors, made the scene into a kaleidoscope. Paris was ablaze.

And then there were the women. Everybody knows that Parisian women are famous for their clothes, their elegance, and their spirit, but it is quite impossible to describe

how they appeared on this day of days. They were a symphony of color, motion, and fragrance. A Parisienne might go without her dinner but she would never go without that indefinable something called chic. Not even wartime rationing has affected that. True, she has had to overcome many handicaps, but she still has her silk stockings and her perfumes and she moves with equal grace on her wooden-soled shoes and on her bicycle. Yes, even on her bicycle. We saw thousands of them, immaculately made up and exquisitely dressed, riding their bicycles with the easy skill and nonchalance of the expert. Later in the day I borrowed a bicycle so that I might join in the melee on the Champs Elysées and I soon found myself talking to one of these creatures. She was of charming and distinguished appearance and she handled her lightweight machine with its underslung handlebars like a veteran. We went to the Ritz for cocktails and she introduced me to her crowd. They were all titled French nobility and her husband was a Russian prince! In what other city

Major Graves borrowed a bicycle from a Russian princess.



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in the world could a princess ride a bicycle without losing her dignity?

But to return to our entry into the city. Greeted everywhere as the heroes of the hour, we made a slow circle tour of the city. We started at the Eiffel Tower and never stopped for three hours. Three hours of viewing all this color and gaiety against a background of old, historic Paris! The Tuilleries, the Palais de Louvre, the Notre Dame. Monuments of other days. The Rue de la Paix, Place de l'Opera, Ile de la Cité, Boulevard Hausmann, Avenue de la Grande Armée, all these names that are so familiar to anyone who has ever read a book about Paris now became living pictures, pulsating with the first intoxication of a new freedom.

Paris is a city of wide avenues and sweeping views, of grand statues and lovely parks, of fine buildings and beautiful shops, and fortunately most of this has escaped Allied bombings. It is only in the factory areas, well out in the suburbs that one sees the effects of well-aimed aerial attacks. I asked a number of Frenchmen how they felt about

this destruction of their property. If there ever was any resentment, it has been quickly and completely replaced by profound gratitude.

Wherever we stopped, we would be surrounded in a few seconds by a group of excited, curious people who would bombard us with questions and vie for the opportunity of welcoming us. It was a matter of honor for them to talk to the first Americans and to offer us what hospitality they could. This applied to high and low alike. They all insisted on showing us the sights, buying us drinks, and confiding their sorrows. From the upper crust at the Ritz to the humble scrubwoman at the Notre Dame, all of them wanted to do something. Thus it was that our round trip of the city lasted all morning and part of the afternoon and left us completely hoarse from shouting *Vive la France* and *Vive l'Amérique*. Now I can see why popular heroes become surfeited with public attention.

At one o'clock we arrived on the Champs Elysées and since General de Gaulle's march

The victory parade.



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was scheduled to take place at three, we decided to park the *grande voiture* right there and continue on foot. Two minutes later, our party of six was hopelessly scattered among the celebrating Parisians. Claude started grinding out pictures. Dick practised his French on a French reporter. El was overwhelmed by a loquacious *douairière*. Horn and Lewis made for the nearest sidewalk cafe. And as for me, I started down the avenue on a cycle with four sprockets and a double chainwheel. No wonder we never got together again until it was time to go home.

The Champs did present an unforgettable spectacle on that afternoon. Imagine a million Frenchmen, completely filling an avenue several hundreds yards wide and a mile long. Put at one end the majestic Arc de Triomphe and at the other the enormous Place de la Concorde. Line the thoroughfare with a double row of giant trees. Picture buildings in the continental style, not too tall but full of dignity. Paint in ten thousand bicycles, each one surmounted by a graceful figure, male or female. Think of all the color in

half a million women's dresses. Visualize a roof of azure. Add a background of flags, decorations, banners, and the panoply of victory. Now put in the middle of all this the whole Second Armored Division of the F.I. and, of course, six members of the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group. *Voila les Champs.*

At half past two, General de Gaulle appeared under the Arc, accompanied by a few members of his staff and General Leclerc of the F.I. There was a moment of silence and then a tremendous clamor arose out of a million throats: de Gaulle, de Gaulle, Vive de Gaulle. His general's uniform impeccable, his képi easily a foot above those of his entourage, he slowly walked towards the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and paid homage with a wreath of gladioli and a cross of roses. One could have heard a pin drop. Then, in the crowded stillness of that poignant moment, a bugler blew taps and all of France's grief seemed to pour forth in those liquid, pathetic tones. For a minute, no one stirred. But in another instant, the strains of the Marseillaise welled up, first around the Arc, then from the entire Place

The grande voiture on the Champs Elysees.



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de l'Etoile, finally down the Champs in a vibrating, jubilant fervor that soared over all of Paris and could be heard the world over. And from the height of his granite pedestal Père la Victoire looked down on this scene in silent approval of a task well done.

For the victory parade which now followed, there was no pomp and circumstance, no honor guard in flamboyant costume, no massed defile of picked troops, no lowslung limousines a la Hitler, no display of armored might. It was just de Gaulle, walking at the head of his aides and followed by General Leclerc. On Broadway it would not even have stopped one traffic light. But on the Champs Elysées it was everything. Time and again, tumultuous cheers would reverberate over the hallowed ground and the General would lift his head, raise his hand in the military salute, and survey the scene of his triumph.

At the Place de la Concorde he listened

again to the Marseillaise. At the Hotel de Ville he was given the honors by a small guard of Spahis. At the Cathedral of Notre Dame he attended a Te Deum under the same vaults that had witnessed the coronation of Napoleon, the baptism of Louis XIV, and the burial of Charles II. But no sovereign of France has ever had such a demonstration of gratitude and loyalty as de Gaulle, because he symbolizes the will to be free. That will outlives the greatest armies in the world.

And now the highpoint of my story is inevitably over. What if I told you that German snipers all along the victory route opened fire the very minute de Gaulle entered the cathedral? What if I said that Paris newspapers estimated their number at over 100,000? What if I pointed out that Claude and Lou on the front fenders were sitting-duck targets all that Saturday morning? What if I marveled at how our vehicle, the largest and most conspicuous on the Champs, could have been missed? What if

A million Frenchmen welcomed the Third Auxers.



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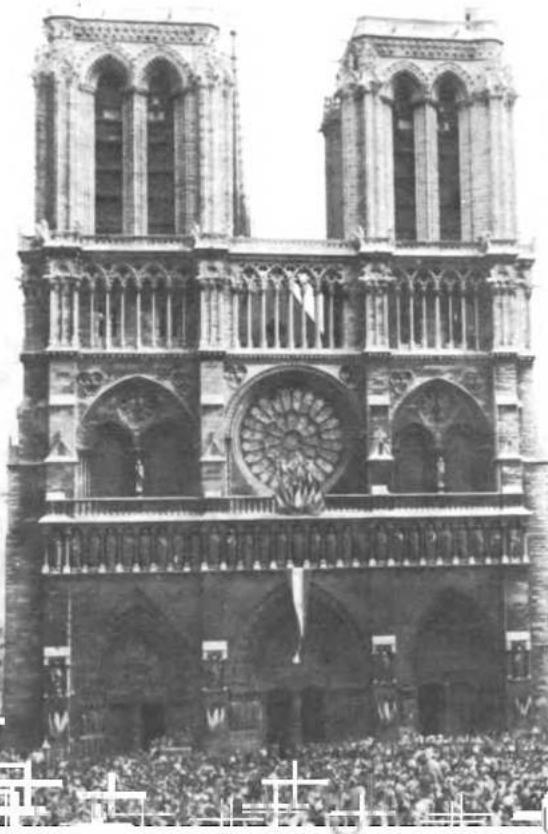
I rhapsodized all over again about the French audacity, their warmheartedness, their simplicity? What if I gave an account of the celebrations that evening? It would all be an anti-climax. For us, the whole war will always be concentrated in that one single day. No use elaborating any further. Later, we will show you the pictures, the souvenirs, the trophies. All I wanted to do this time is give you some idea of how it feels to meet the liberated people of Europe. If I have succeeded, you will join me with *Vive la France, Vive de Gaulle, Vive l'Amérique.*

While Major Graves and his teammates were thus getting acquainted with Paris and the Parisians, Third Aux Headquarters moved to Senonches, eighteen miles to the west. This site became a concentration point for medical units that were waiting to catch up with the front.

These units were mainly field hospitals and evacuation hospitals. Of the two, field hospitals were the more mobile. The First Army Surgeon now devised a plan to fill the medical void at the front. Triage at the clearing station would no longer separate transportables from non-transportables. All wounded would go to the field hospital. These hospitals would function as first-priority and second-priority installations with all three platoons concentrated at one point. Extra Third Aux teams would be brought up. Evacuation hospitals would be eliminated for the time being.

The plan went into operation immediately but it failed to come up to expectations. With transportation critically low, there were never enough ambulances to keep the casualties moving and as a result the field hospital bogged down. Third Aux teams that worked under these conditions became greatly discouraged. Their mortality rates went up and the whole experience merely

The parvis of Notre Dame on 26 August.



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underscored the fact that separate hospitals for the severely wounded are an absolute necessity. Fortunately, the impasse came to an end in the middle of September when the lines again became stable.

The Blitzkrieg lasted from 1 August till 15 September during which time First Army covered the astounding distance of four hundred miles. The axis of advance was first east to Paris, then north to Belgium, and finally east again, so that the troops came to face that part of the Siegfried Line skirting Belgium and Luxembourg. It was a line stretching a hundred miles from north to south and it held First Army at bay for a full five months.

The first two weeks of September were still full of good news. Brussels fell on 3 September, Antwerp on the 4th, Namur on the 5th, Sédan on the 7th, and Liège on the 8th. The Meuse was crossed at many points without heavy fighting. The Germans were caught with their pants down. Three whole divisions were cut off in the vicinity of Mons and wandered through the woods for days, much to the discomfiture of Third Auxers who were already operating in the area.

On the evening of 4 September, the third platoon of the 47th Field Hospital received orders to set up south of Mons. The orders came in at night. "Get going as fast as you can." The trucks started rolling at about eleven. It was pitch black.

"I wonder how the colonel expects us to set up on a night like this," said one of the drivers, his eyes glued to the road.

"Shut up. Orders is orders." The voice came out of the dark.

"Hell, I can't even tell where the verge is."

"Stop a minute. I think I can see some signs."

Captain Warren got out of the cab and advanced hesitatingly in the direction of the sign. Even from the verge, he could not

make out the lettering, so he started to cross a shallow ditch. At this point, he realized that his footing was very uncertain but before he had a chance to catch himself, his feet became entangled in a soft object and he was pitched flat on his face. His first thought was: "An ambush! And me without a gun!"

Desperately he searched his pockets for a weapon to defend himself. All he had was a flashlight. Now the soft object over which he had fallen raised itself up. After an interminable interval during which Warren alternately said his prayers and tried to work his flashlight, the silence was broken not by shots but by German gutturals: "Kamerad!" And with that, two hands went up into the air.

By this time Warren had regained his composure sufficiently to find the switch on his light. What he saw was a German soldier in battle dress. Warren could speak no German but he accepted the unconditional surrender with appropriate gestures and took his quarry back to the truck. "Look what I found," he said. "A prisoner. I ought to get at least a Bronze Star for this!" Warren got no Bronze Star but he has the distinction of being the only Third Auxer to take a German prisoner.

After this delay and many detours, the convoy finally pulled into the field near Mons. Another platoon had already arrived, but without accomplishing more than confusion. And no wonder. Setting up a hospital in the dark is like eating soup with a fork: the job gets more complicated by the minute. Third Auxers knew that under such circumstances they were more useful in their sleeping bags. Everybody grabbed as many blankets as he could and stretched out where he was.

With the first stirrings of dawn, activity began. The platoon commander marked the tent sites, the pitching crews laid out the

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canvas, and the Third Auxers looked around for a place to shave. Then came the sudden rat-tat-tat of a machine gun. The fire was returned from another field and the hospital was caught in the middle. What was happening? A band of hungry Germans had invaded the mess tent of a unit in a nearby field. Surprised, they opened fire and shot several cooks. In the resulting scuffle, the Germans had very little time to eat. Most of them were killed and the rest taken prisoner. Later in the day, Third Auxers discovered a pile of German corpses in the woods. This pile grew to ghastly proportions in the next few days.

In one short week, practically all of Belgium was liberated. The inhabitants were drunk with joy, just as the Parisians had been. Like the French, the Belgians are a high-strung and emotional people. Unlike the French, they had escaped the ravages of actual battle and consequently they were able to show their gratitude in a material

way. Wherever the Third Auxers went, the people from the surrounding villages would come to offer delicacies: cakes and cookies, fresh butter, and all sorts of fruit. Third Auxers did their best. They ate and they ate and they ate.

At other times, the welcome took a different form. In the little town of Jodoigne, Third Auxers parked their truck on the market place very soon after the first Americans had swept through. There was the usual exchange of greetings with the burghers and then the Third Auxers made ready to depart. The crowd scattered. At the last moment, a bright and charming boy ran up. In one hand he held a *flacon* with an exquisite liqueur; in the other, an elegant silver tumbler. He never said a word. He simply showed a disarming smile, climbed on the running board, and started pouring drinks, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. And all the time he smiled. It wasn't the liqueur that the Third Auxers will remember, although it undoubtedly represented the family's most prized possession. It was that smile. That smile was more eloquent than all the words the burghers had said.

Meanwhile, the German resistance was stiffening. In spite of his severe losses, the enemy was able to organize his positions behind the fortifications of the West Wall. In the First Army sector, the first serious clashes took place on the approaches to Aachen. The southern end of the line was really no line at all and it was here that the Third Aux suffered its first road-casualties.

As Third Aux Adjutant, Lieutenant Sensenbach was on a trip to deliver mail to the teams. He was accompanied by Sergeants Mullison and Hultine. These men left Bastogne on 21 September and disappeared without leaving a clue. For months, there was no word. Then the story came out. Let Sensenbach speak for himself.



General Bradley decorates General Hodges,  
Commanding General of First Army.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

"The sky was beautifully clear that morning and the war seemed very remote. Sergeants Mullison and Hultine and I had been out from our Headquarters at Eupen on a three-day trip to visit some of the more distant teams to the north, west and south. Our 'cargo' was the monthly pay-roll, two sacks of mail, some new clothing, and a few instruments. We had almost completed our mission, having reached most of the teams by the end of the second day, and we stayed overnight with Paul Maloney, Captain Ferarro, and Louis Wolfe down near Bastogne. Many times thereafter I was to remember gratefully those extra eggs which Louis insisted I have for my breakfast that morning. About nine o'clock we were on the road once more, heading back toward Eupen. We had completed all of our scheduled stops. One team with the 42nd Field Hospital had

moved however, so we decided to stop at St. Vith on our way back. We had to pay Betty Asselin, who was with that team. St. Vith was not far out of our way, but it took us several miles closer to the German border than we had intended to go. Little did we guess . . . .

Yes, the war seemed very remote as we rode along in our 'recon' which only yesterday had balked considerably, but today seemed to have decided against stubbornness and was running smoothly. There was not a sign of war to be seen; the countryside was silent and untouched for a change, and we seemed to be the only people on the road. There were no Army installations along our route, nor any troops, and practically no road signs. Then, after about an hour of uneventful driving we came to a town called Clervaux. We checked our map, and found

Third Auxers in St. Quentin.



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that we were in the northern tip of Luxembourg, several miles to the east of our intended route. The colorful flags flying along the streets told us that the town had been liberated, but there wasn't a person, civilian or soldier, to be seen anywhere. Outside the town we finally found an EFFE boy patrolling the road with a rifle and wearing the usual brassard. He spoke no English and I no French, so I inquired in German for the best road to St. Vith. He advised us not to take the road we'd intended to take because of enemy troops believed to be a few miles ahead, and instead he showed us another smaller road, which, he said, led directly to St. Vith.

We had no reason to distrust the boy, so we set out as he had instructed. Within fifteen minutes, however, we were sorry, for we suddenly came upon a carefully camouflaged German road-block just around the bend of a dangerous hairpin-curve. The road was very narrow, and ran around a sort of ledge half-way up a steep mountain-side. Just as we recognized the road-block ahead and Hultine jammed on the brakes, an ambushed machine gun mounted just over the shoulder of the road beside me opened up. How long the firing continued I've no idea, but since there was no return fire from us, the Germans soon ceased firing. About twenty soldiers came out of their ambush on all sides with leveled rifles. Fortunately neither of the sergeants was hit, and I had only flesh wounds in my right leg and could still walk fairly well. We were searched for weapons. Not finding any, the Krauts changed their attitude. I had studied German for six years in school, so I was able to talk with the non-com in charge, but I couldn't persuade him to release us as medical personnel. We had seen too much, he countered, and if he let us go, he knew he could expect an artillery barrage to come in on him within a few minutes. They treated us surprisingly well, and allowed us to re-

main together in our evacuation behind their lines. We were interrogated rather superficially, and they seemed chiefly concerned with our relations with Russia. When we refused to answer some questions we were not pressed or threatened, a fact which surprised me considerably.

After a few days of evacuation by wood-burning truck and on foot, our daily-increasing group of American prisoners finally reached Stammlager (colloquially known as 'Stalag') VI-G atop a high plateau overlooking the city of Bonn and the Rhine. Here our "Third Aux advance party" was split up; the non-coms went across the Rhine, and I was hospitalized in a crude POW hospital. A young American surgeon, who had been captured back in the Falaise gap in August, was working desperately with a few medical aid men to care for the ill and wounded British and American prisoners arriving every day. They had only useless equipment, no sanitation, no sterilization, and very few medicines or drugs—only vermin-infested barracks with straw sacks and thin, dirty blankets on wooden frames for beds. And each day increased the need for medical care for more and more men. Fortunately my leg healed after a few weeks, and I was ready to be evacuated to a regular POW camp in German-occupied Poland. However, because I could speak German, the doctor asked me to stay there with him as an interpreter and a kind of administrative assistant.

And so it happened that for five months my address was Stalag VI-G, Hardthoehe, Duisdorf, Bonn, Rheinland, Deutschland. An address, even if it was as long as that, meant nothing however, for no mail ever got through to me, and the monthly letter we were allowed to write seldom got past the formidable front gates of the camp. Until Christmas we had enough Red Cross packages to give each man the equivalent of one every other week. This supplement to the

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occasional porridge and the daily one-sixth of a loaf of sour black bread, cup of *ersatz* tea and bowl of cabbage soup (?) from the Germans kept us going pretty well, thanks to some good old American ingenuity.

We learned much about ourselves, about our fellow Americans, about our Allies and about our enemies during those long days of waiting. Each day we watched hopefully as the Air Corps passed overhead on its endless missions, and each night we watched the RAF bombing Cologne, Weseling, the Ruhr industries, or Coblenz in the distance. We heard the German tanks and trucks rattling toward the front under cover of darkness, and listened anxiously for the distant roll of artillery, which we hoped was incoming. At first we were certain that the Yanks would break through to us within a few days or weeks at most. But the days and weeks passed, and winter set in. Through the underground channels and from the incoming prisoners we learned only that our Armies hadn't yet broken through the formidable Siegfried line completely, that support from the rear was lacking, and that ammunition was running low. The rumors grew and grew, and we waited and hoped desperately that this was just the lull before the big push to the Rhine. Yet, black as the outlook was, somehow there were still smiles, small jokes, an attempt to keep clean, and to get exercise. The men even asked me to begin a daily class in elementary spoken German. And always there was the hope that the news would be better tomorrow . . . or at least the day after tomorrow.

The one brightest memory of those five long months at Bonn is that of our Christmas celebration. The night before Christmas we held a short service in one of the smaller buildings. There were carols, reading of the story of the Nativity, the Lord's Prayer, and a short talk by an RAF boy who was a patient and had been a prisoner for a year and a half.

Christmas day, however, was the high spot, for nothing was quite so important as food to us 'Kriegies' (our own abbreviation for the German word Kriegsgefangener, meaning prisoner of war). For the previous month and a half we had denied ourselves the coffee, chocolate, and cocoa which came in our Red Cross boxes. We saved them to trade on the local German black market. There were a number of Polish prisoners who had been there for five years, and these men were taken out of the camp daily to work on farms, in factories, or in the cities to clean up bomb damage. This gave them the necessary contacts with civilians and the black market. These Poles were old-timers at smuggling things, and so just before Christmas they did our trading for us, taking our coffee and chocolate out with them in the morning and bringing back such foods as potatoes and bread in the evening.

In our inner compound, where the hospital was located, we had fewer guards watching us. On Christmas morning we



Lieutenant Sensenbach.

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worked in groups of twos over five small stoves, burning stolen coal-dust briquettes, to prepare our dinner. We couldn't smuggle in enough food for all the patients, so we made them the best dinner we could. Then the permanent personnel, who had run the hospital since September, had their smuggled dinner in the doctors' room. We had an evergreen tree, decorated with small red apples, cellophane packing from Red Cross parcels, and silver paper dropped by our Air Corps to confuse the Kraut's radar instruments. Bed sheets on three small tables butted end-to-end, a few apples and some evergreen twigs placed in the center of the table, a crockery bowl and a tin cup for each person, a fork or spoon for every two or three men completed our setting. We had hors d'oeuvres of pilchards on toasted *white* bread, a thin soup made from bouillon powder and onions stolen from the garden the night before, roasted goose (smuggled in alive two weeks before and kept alive until the day before when it was killed and cleaned in an air raid shelter, and then roasted by the Frenchmen who ran the camp cook-house), mashed potatoes, peas and carrots, dressing, giblet gravy, corned beef hash, white Rhein wine, rice pudding, fried fruit pies (made by an infantry lieutenant from Oklahoma who had one leg in a plaster cast), coffee, cheese and crackers, American cigarettes, and red wine. We made the most of the occasion. We stretched our dinner from one o'clock until six and sang every English and American song we could remember. That day, if never again, we had enough to eat. Strained though it was, that Christmas dinner will never be forgotten by those fifteen men, nor by the starved Russians to whom we gave the food that was left over.

As I said, Christmas was our high spot. From then on, our luck seemed to run out. Three days later, on an incredibly foggy night, the RAF came over; they missed their target and their incendiary bombs rained

down upon our hospital. The only permanent buildings we had, containing all our beds, our medical supplies, our clothes and our food all burned completely. There was no water to fight the fire, and the electric current was cut off. Somehow we got all the patients out of the buildings, and not one American or British life was lost. The other prisoners were not so fortunate. For the survivors there was untold chaos and misery ahead. After about a week the German colonel in charge of our hospital came around in a perfunctory manner to see how many of us still survived. He seemed disappointed to find so many still to be fed.

The next month was a long, hard one. We tried to reestablish our hospital in some flimsy frame barracks which previously had housed only Russians dying of tuberculosis. The days were cloudy and cold. News came of the slaughter in the Bulge. Hundreds of starved, beaten, dying prisoners began to stream in. Our miserable little hospital did not even have paper bandages for the hundreds of frost-bitten feet, or drugs for the endless dysentery cases. And then the RAF came back . . . . This time they dropped not only incendiaries but powerful concussion bombs as well. Somehow we got through that night without a casualty, but when the cold morning light filtered through the rain there was not a wall standing. Evacuation across the Rhine began immediately.

We were marched over to Siegburg to await rail transportation. Locked for three days in a warehouse in the factory district of that town, we sweated out the air raids. When at last we were taken down to the rail yards and loaded into box cars, the sirens wailed again. The planes didn't bomb or strafe Siegburg. That night the train pulled out.

We were sent to Limburg, twenty-six miles east of Coblenz. There I spent the worst month of all. That place was so bad, it simply defies description. It was at Lim-

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burg that I first learned of the capture of the other Third Auxers. None of them was still there. (They had passed through a month before.) But Major Huber of the 42nd Field Hospital (the one I was trying to reach at St. Vith) was still there, and from him I got the story of what had happened.

As spring approached, the news got better and the air raids came nearer. Every day there were several bombs dropped on the rail yards just over the hill from our barracks, and one night sixty American officers were killed when a bomb intended for the town fell short and hit a barracks building. Toward the end of February there were wild rumors of evacuation, and soon large groups of prisoners began to be moved out. I was one of the last Americans to leave. I'd been hoping to stay as long as possible in the hope of recapture, but when the Americans crossed the Rhine in early March I was evacuated.

There were only eight American officers left by that time. We were taken by guards on civilian trains down to Frankfurt, where we sweated out a long daylight bombing in a rat-infested dungeon beneath the floor of the railroad station. That evening we started out once more, this time for Bad Orb, well publicized in the pictures in Life magazine. When we arrived at Bad Orb at two o'clock the next morning we found that the camp didn't take officers. That meant a few more nights on trains crowded with refugees and their household goods.

Eventually we reached our destination, an officers' camp built on a mountain top in northern Bavaria above the picturesque town of Hammelburg. It was the best organized camp I had seen, but what meant more to me was that as I entered the gate, I met Charlie Serbst! Harry Fisher, Gene Galvin, and Saul Dworkin were there too, and did we ever have a reunion! It wasn't like the

old parties in England perhaps, but the spirit was the same! The food in the camp was pretty awful most of the time, but morale was high. Everyone tried to keep as clean as possible, a series of diversified lectures was organized, and above all, the weather was warm and the sun cheering. After a few weeks, the artillery began to rumble once more, and, as always, the rumors grew with the noise. Evacuate! Those men knew what it meant. They had marched 350 miles from Poland in the middle of winter!

The order came on 27 March at about four o'clock. We were to be ready to leave by 7:30 that night. Hastily we began to tie our meager belongings of cans, boxes and rags together, but Fate and General Patton's tanks interrupted our preparations. At 4:30 there was a sudden burst of gunfire followed by volleys from large and small weapons. Then over a hilltop to the northeast a Sherman tank poked its nose. The camp went wild. Other tanks came into view on all sides, followed by infantrymen. The front lines had reached us at last! The Germans put up a token defense but, within an hour, the firing ceased and the tanks came smashing through the barbed-wire entanglements. Then we learned the truth.

No, the lines hadn't caught up with us; this was only a special task force from the 4th Armored sent by General Patton to liberate us, and they had blasted their way for sixty miles through the German lines. We would have to hurry. By riding on the tanks and half-tracks we might get back. Or, if we wanted to try it, we could strike out on our own. The men poured out. Hundreds climbed on the tanks and half-tracks until nothing could be seen but the tracks beneath a huge mass of men.

Of course the Germans knew of this task force, and they were waiting for us with their tanks, bazookas and hastily-built roadblocks. The story of that night would make

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a book in itself. It ended in a complete fiasco. A few men were able to get through the lines, among them Charlie Serbst, but most of the 'liberated' prisoners were recaptured by the S.S. troops who combed the woods for days. All of the task force men were either killed or captured. There was only one thing ahead—another evacuation.

This time it was a box-car to Nurnberg. We were unloaded outside the walls of Hitler's spectacular Sports Palast, the scene of the annual mass meetings of the Nazi party. The camp was a mile or two away. When we arrived we found that all the British and American ground and air force officers were being evacuated to this camp from all over the rapidly-dwindling Reich. The men lived in large canvas tents and slept on straw. Each day more marching columns of prisoners arrived from Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and northern Germany. Organization was beginning to appear when the familiar distant thunder was heard once more. The Allied armies were advancing on Nurnberg!

The Germans were not slow about getting us on the move this time. All those able to march were started out on the road. The remainder, who were either too ill or too crippled to march, were loaded into a long train of box cars. Harry Fisher and I, who had stuck together since the abortive liberation of Hammelburg, were assigned as medical personnel. Our destination was Moosburg. We started out for Regensburg, but just before we got there, the rail yards were bombed out, so we had to return to Nurnberg and start out again, this time down through Ingolstadt on the Danube. Our luck held out miraculously, for we had no sooner passed through the center of Ingolstadt when the sirens wailed their warning, and from a spot six miles outside the city we watched wave after wave of heavies blast the rail center we had just passed through. But we were not to escape completely, for the heavy bombers had a fighter escort who

spotted our train and came down upon us before we were aware of them. They strafed the train, but concentrated their attention on the engine. The box cars were unlocked, and it was unbelievable how rapidly those crippled boys could run across the plowed fields to find cover in a ditch. Fortunately only one man was hit. His right fibula was shot away completely. At first it looked as though we'd have to attempt an amputation right there in the field. He was fortunate in having an orthopedic surgeon right there. I had stolen all sorts of medical supplies from the Krauts at Nurnberg and some others were found on the train, so there in that field, using water from the bullet-riddled engine, we fixed up our patient, complete with a plaster cast, just as if we were in an American field hospital.



Limburg.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

By the time we got to Moosburg, we were ready for just about anything. The Krauts were in a state of chaos. They had long feared that the end was approaching. Now that it was upon them, they were hopelessly confused. A nation of followers, they were without a leader to look to for orders. As the lines advanced, we followed the battle on our maps, and hopefully listened to every rumor. Of course the big question was not *when* would they reach us, but would we be *evacuated* before they could reach us. We have since been told that Hitler ordered all the American and British officers evacuated to the Austrian Alps to be held as hostages. Then, when there was not even time to evacuate us, he ordered us all shot! Fortunately, the Army was disintegrating, and the order was not carried out. At about this time, through the offices of the International Red Cross, an agreement was reached not to evacuate prisoners in the face of advancing Allied armies. We sighed with relief and just waited.

We organized ourselves into regiments, companies, and platoons to make our return more efficient, and I was placed in charge of medical and food supplies for the camp hospital. When our liberation finally took place on the 29th of April, a Sunday morning, I was busy in the hospital, where I couldn't see any of the excitement. There was a short skirmish in the woods outside the camp, for there were still some fanatical S.S. men who tried to prevent our liberation. The resistance was soon overcome, and I heard the roar of the prisoners welcoming the tankers as they came crashing through the gates. I could not help but think of another day, a month before, when I had heard a similar welcome and I wondered . . .

As I boarded that C-47 at the Ingolstadt airport two weeks later I guess I must have looked like a Bill Mauldin cartoon, for I had on a blue cotton overseas cap with a red cross sewed on one side, a Czech cavalry overcoat

(the kind with the large skirt designed to cover the horse too), a collarless English army shirt, a pair of French army trousers, and a pair of brilliant orange woolen baseball socks from Sweden. But cartoon or not, I was free at last after almost eight months of captivity, and I was on my way home!

We were flown to Rheims, taken by hospital train to Le Havre, and on my birthday I boarded a boat bound for the States. Imagine my surprise when I found that First Army Headquarters was on the same ship, and with them was Colonel Crisler! Talk about a reunion! By coincidence the boat docked just two years and two days after I had left the States bound for England and the Third Aux. What's more, I got home on 6 June, the anniversary of the Normandy invasion.

Well, that's my story. As I look back over it, I see that I've really just skimmed the surface. Someday when we all get together for a reunion, you corner me if you are interested, and I'll tell you about the Kriegies' ingenious wood-burning stoves, about Green Hornet soup and black bread pudding, about the air raids on Bonn and Cologne, about the German civilians, about the songs around a tiny hospital stove when there was no electricity, about the interesting cases we had in our hospital, about the time when I had to give anesthesia while the surgeon operated with an old razor blade, and about all sorts of things. Yes, Third Auxers have much to talk about. It was a great outfit and I, for one, am proud to have belonged to it."

Sensenbach was not the first Third Auxer to feel the sting of the German troops that were left to defend the Reich. At the moment of his capture eight other Third Auxers were already in a corner. This was Major Crandall's team.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

When the drive for Germany began to lose its momentum the Allies decided on a daring attempt to by-pass the West Wall. For this venture a whole airborne army was to be delivered along a sixty-mile strip from Eindhoven in the south to Arnhem in the north. Through this corridor the British would swiftly push their troops, rush for the Zuyder Zee, cut off the Germans to the west, and open up a road to the east. Planning started on 10 September. The 101st Airborne was to seize the sixteen-mile stretch from Eindhoven to Uden. The 82nd Airborne was to seize the bridges at Grave and Nijmegen. The British 1st Airborne and a Polish brigade were to seize Arnhem and exploit to the north. A carpet would unroll. If successful, operation MARKET GARDEN would deal a death blow to the Germans.

Although the plan itself had to be worked out in great haste, the troops were seasoned veterans who needed only the briefest kind of indoctrination. The flat terrain of Holland made any number of drop zones possible. In the 101st area, Zon would be assaulted by the 506th Parachute Infantry. Farther north the 502nd would establish itself at St. Oedenrode and the 501st at Vechel. Mindful of the great difficulties of a night drop, General Brereton boldly decided that this operation would come off in broad daylight. The Allies had come a long way.

The medical plans kept pace with the tactical plans. In Normandy the 101st had landed its surgical team with the first wave, well before H Hour, while the 82nd had chosen to hold its team back until the evening of D Day. The same pattern prevailed in the MARKET operation. Major Crandall felt strongly that his men should be in the vanguard because even a twelve-hour delay in surgery might jeopardize the lives of the seriously wounded. He therefore placed his team with advance elements of the 326th Medical Company which would be landed

at H plus 1. On the next day the rest of the medical company would be flown in, together with a whole platoon of the 50th Field Hospital and one First Aux team. The First Aux team-leader, Major Witter, would be a member of Crandall's party.

In point of medical supplies, the operation far exceeded anything that had gone before. Six gliders in the advance wave would carry enough equipment for a streamlined clearing station. For the later wave, sixty-four gliders were made available and these would deliver practically a complete field hospital platoon. Nothing was overlooked. Generators, autoclaves, x-ray machines, stoves, operating tables, every imaginable item would be floated down from the skies, either in gliders or by parachute. Only the Americans could afford to be so prodigal.

D Day dawned cold and gray at Ramsburg Park, the take-off point. As the morning wore on, the skies began to clear and the Third Auxers fell to discussing their chances. Would daylight help them or hinder them? It all depended on luck and air cover. For Rodda at least, the day started unlucky.

Just as his glider was taking to the air, the tow rope broke. The glider dived sharply downward, scraped some trees, and careened to a stop at the edge of the field. The men were shaken up but not enough to keep them on the ground. The rope was spliced. The glider was wheeled back. The men climbed in. Twenty minutes later they were in the air again. Twenty minutes delay. It did not seem much but it meant that they would have no fighter protection. What a way to start a trip.

The route lay across southern England and the Strait of Dover. Visibility was excellent. Just as Rodda caught his first glimpse of the Continent he saw a life-raft bobbing up and down on the restless waters of the

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English Channel. A dozen paratroopers were clinging to its sides.

"Look," he said to the pilot. "Those poor fellows. I bet that water is cold today."

"Maybe," was the answer. "But they are going to sleep in a warm bed tonight and we sleep in the open—if we sleep."

While Rodda was thus left to ponder, the advance elements of the armada were already approaching the landing zone. At Bourg-Leopold they made a right-angle turn and a few minutes later they passed over the front lines. Still no enemy interference. The Germans were caught napping. But not for long. The head of the column escaped but the tail-end suffered. Six gliders disintegrated in mid-air. Crandall's men kept their eyes glued on the road below. Orientation was easy. They skirted Eindhoven, picked up "the road," and spotted the Wilhelmina Canal. Now for the landing. But what was that? An 88!

The gun was situated on the canal, several hundred yards west of the road. A few minutes earlier it had opened fire on paratroopers who were advancing on the bridge. A bazooka man had sneaked around the back. At the very moment Crandall's glider appeared overhead, this man let fly. The gun was disabled and the crew scattered. Crandall's glider skimmed over the top and came down in the assembly area to the north.

Of the seventy gliders, six were lost. The medical personnel was intact except for the usual bruises and black eyes. Crandall suffered a severe sprain of the knee but the excitement was so high, he hardly noticed it. There was work to be done. He made a tally of his men. Rodda was missing!

Rodda was taking it on the chin. Flying low over a countryside that was now thoroughly alerted, tow-plane and glider were buffeted unmercifully. At one point two shells exploded simultaneously on either side



Loading up.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

of the flimsy craft. The glider was riddled but the concussion of one shell neutralized that of the other and the pilot was able to avert a fatal side-slip. No one was injured and the only result of the terrific punishment was that the tow-plane pilot became confused and cut the glider loose too soon. It landed in an undefended pasture from where Rodda was able to make his way to Zon.

Casualties had already been gathered up. The medics pitched a tent and the Third Auxers gave preliminary treatment. In the midst of this, there was a terrific explosion. The Germans had blown the bridge, the very bridge over which the British were to advance. This was bad news but the paratroopers did not let it interfere with their sense of humor. A company commander

was receiving first aid for a shell wound when he was hit again, this time by a bullet. "Hurry up, medics," he wisecracked. "The Krauts are gaining on you."

Nevertheless, the blowing of the bridge was a serious setback. It isolated the 101st and it delayed the capture of Eindhoven a full day. But the Third Auxers had other things to worry about. Towards the end of the afternoon Crandall went on a reconnaissance with the commanding officer of the medical company. They had spotted a large building that looked like a hospital and they were anxious to see if it could be used. The building proved to be a large tuberculosis sanatorium and the Dutch doctors and nurses received the Americans with open arms. This was their day of liberation. An entire wing was put at the disposal of the



**Gliders aloft.**

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

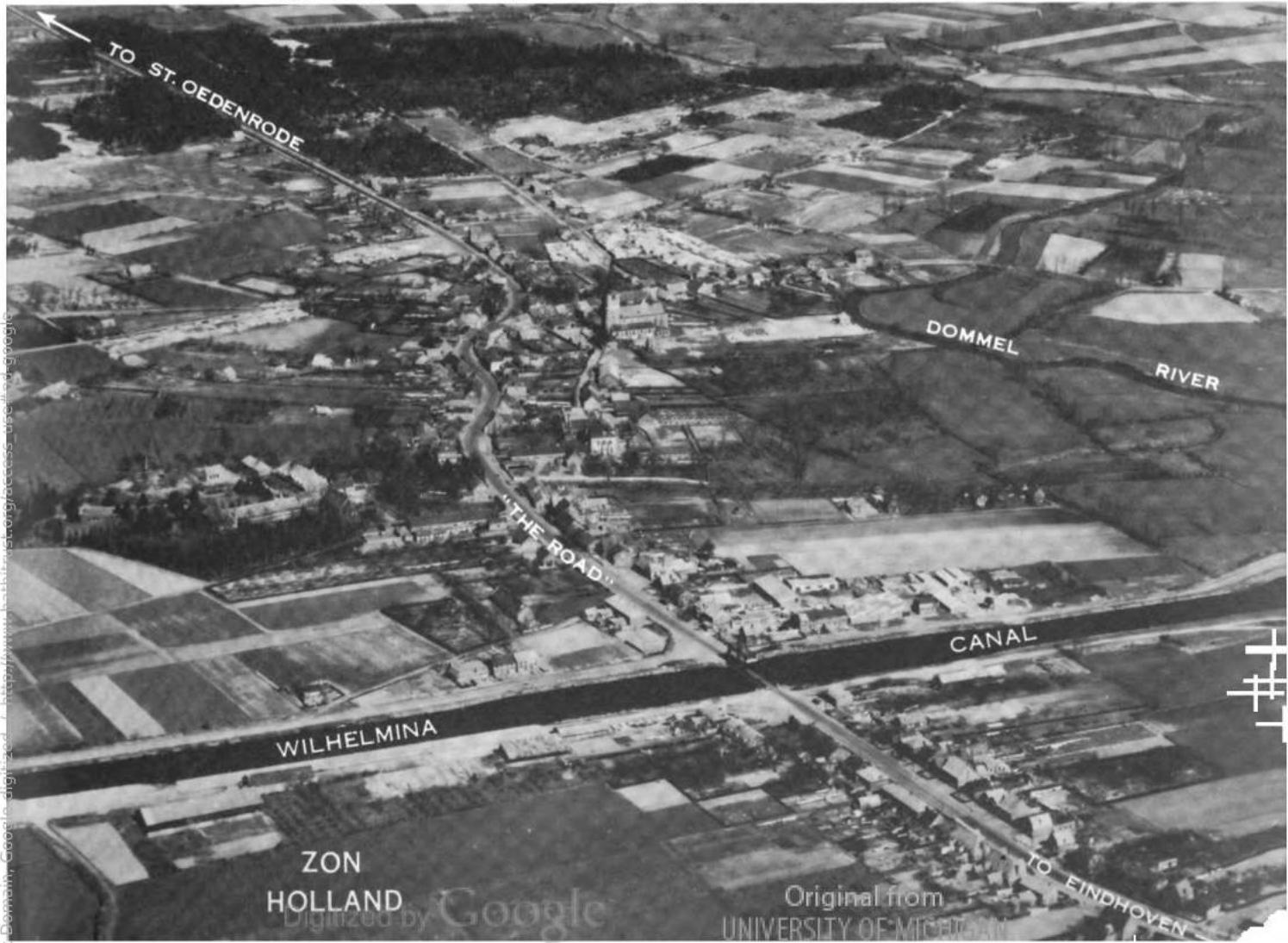
medical company and before dark, all casualties had been transferred. In spite of his now very painful knee, Crandall supervised all the arrangements. He selected his operating theater, deployed his men, organized the triage, and undertook the first surgery himself with the knowledge born of experience. By midnight more than a hundred casualties had been operated on!

On D plus 1 the second wave arrived with the rest of the medical company, the field hospital, and the First Aux team. The situation at Vechel where the hospital was to set up was unsettled and the men went to work at Zon for the time being.

At the end of D Day the 101st Airborne was solidly entrenched along its stretch of road but much hard fighting was in store.

Zon from the air. The hospital building is plainly shown in the left foreground.

The landings had not come as a complete surprise to the Germans and they took counter-measures immediately. New divisions were moved in, especially tank divisions, and the 101st was woefully short of anti-tank weapons. The full effect of these counter-measures became apparent during the next few days. The 101st was fighting with its back against the wall. It had to keep the enemy away from two fronts, each sixteen miles in length. It had to expand to the north and to the south. And it had to guard its lines of communication. Under such conditions it was impossible to pursue a pre-arranged plan. Units had to be moved from one trouble spot to another at the spur of the moment. The situation at Zon was a good example.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

German strategy aimed at cutting the corridor at its base which was at Zon. The town housed Division Headquarters but was otherwise very thinly held. On D plus 1 heavy fighting developed at Best, several miles away, and Zon was stripped of everything except for Headquarters personnel and a bunch of free-lancing glider-pilots whose exit had been cut off by the blowing of the bridge. On D plus 2 there were reports that German tanks were approaching from the southeast. A reconnaissance party located them a few hundred yards south of the bridge. The Germans opened fire and, by the weight of their armor, drove the Americans back. German tanks could easily have captured the Division Command Post as well as the clearing station but they were discouraged by a few well-placed shots from a 57 mm gun (the only one in Zon) and they retreated for the day. This attack underscored the vulnerable situation and the field hospital was moved out. It went to

Vechel where at the moment things were more quiet.

Early in the morning of D plus 3 a strong force of the 107th Panzer Brigade was deployed south of the Wilhelmina Canal. A two-jeep patrol set out to find them. Always a glutton for punishment, Dworkin went along for the ride. The jeeps crossed the bridge, turned east, and advanced along a narrow byroad. Here they met a British armored car which had come up around Eindhoven. British and Americans decided to continue their reconnaissance together. The British vehicle, having more protection, took the lead. Suddenly the driver became aware of a body of troops directly ahead. They seemed to be crossing the road but in the darkness it was difficult to tell who they were. The three vehicles stopped and an American captain walked up to the armored car to see what the delay was. Spotting the shadowy figures in the distance, he said to the Britishers:



Landing at Zon.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

"Who are these men, Colonel?"

"Why, they are some of your chaps, aren't they?"

"Like hell they are! They're Krauts. Let's get out of here."

Everybody piled in but the road was so narrow that the vehicles could not turn around. Slowly and noisily the motorcade backed out. By this time the Germans too realized that something was wrong and they opened fire. Dworkin made himself as small as possible in the jeep. With bullets whipping around his ears he made his way back to the hospital. It wasn't a joy-ride after all.

The fight for Zon which now developed took place within spitting distance of the sanatorium. The Germans far outnumbered the Americans and moreover they had tanks. Everybody who could carry a gun was pressed into service. Thirty clerks from Headquarters 1st Battalion marched unsuspectingly into Zon from the north. They exchanged their typewriters for guns and jumped into the fray. The Americans fell back across the bridge. Casualties were heavy. At one point bullets ripped through the operating room and Third Auxers ducked for their lives. All seemed lost when suddenly ten British tanks happened into town. These tanks had been requested the day before but had been unable to reach Zon. They immediately engaged the German tanks and knocked out four of them. This saved the day. The Germans hesitated, withdrew across the bridge and were later routed by a combined infantry-tank charge. Zon remained in American hands but it had been a close call.

On other fronts too, D plus 3 was a critical day. The British were stalled in their efforts to bring up reinforcements. The fight at Best prevented the 101st from expanding rapidly to the north. The 82nd Airborne was having trouble of its own. It had succeeded in crossing the Meuse at Grave but

it had failed in crossing the Waal at Nijmegen. The British at Arnhem were cut off. The bridge across the Nether Rhine could not be wrested from the enemy who was constantly pouring reinforcements into the area. The picture was black.

Now the wisdom of the medical plan for the division became apparent. Evacuation of casualties from the corridor was at best hazardous and at the least impossible. Just before D plus 3 Crandall had been able to get a number of the most seriously wounded on a southbound convoy. Thirty ambulances and four trucks managed to find their way through the darkness to the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Bourg-Leopold. After that, no further trips were made for four days. The entire burden of caring for the Division casualties fell on the clearing station at Zon and the field hospital at Vechel. It was only because these installations had



Rodda points to bullet hole in his glider.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

been so lavishly supplied from the start that they were able to keep going.

Later in the day the 82nd Airborne in a daring maneuver secured the bridge at Nijmegen but this was the last tactical success of the salient for a long time. Zon became too hot for the 101st Command Post. It was moved north. The clearing station continued to operate there however.

On D plus 5 Crandall went to Vechel to establish liaison with the field hospital there and he immediately became embroiled in yet another violent battle. Vechel was a German target because the bridge across the Willem Vaart was vital to traffic, just as the bridge across the Wilhelmina Canal was vital at Zon. The action at Vechel marked the climax of the struggle for control of the road.

When Crandall arrived in the town, Vechel was held by one battalion of paratroopers. The Germans knew it and they launched their attack from three directions with forces outnumbering the Americans ten to one. At eleven o'clock, Germans were across the road to Uden. The 2nd Battalion of the 506th went out to meet them. When it arrived a Mark V was shooting up the light British and American artillery. A 57 mm gun was all the Americans had. The duel between this gun and the German tank took just three minutes. The German shot first. He missed. The 57 mm shot next and, by sheer luck, set the tank on fire. The Germans fell back.

Crandall decided to go back to Zon at the very time when German infantry cut across the road leading south. His jeep was brought



Third Auxers were heartened by the arrival of the rest of the Medical Company.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

under fire and he sought cover in a ditch. Again, reinforcements arrived in the nick of time. Glider infantry came marching up from St. Oedenrode. Quite unaware of the situation and using little more than rifle fire, the Americans walked right through the Germans and had the road open again at four o'clock. Later in the afternoon the enemy came in from the north but this time he was stopped at the railroad bridge. It was a preview of Bastogne.

On D plus 8 the Germans cut the road again south of Vechel. Before the Americans could do anything about it, the Germans had built up substantial forces and it took a whole day of heavy fighting to dislodge them. On the same day the bridge-head across the Nether Rhine at Arnhem that had been won with so much sacrifice was lost. Dogged by bad luck from the start, the British and Poles had to give up. Less than one-third were able to get back to their own lines. The fighting now settled down to a slugging match.

On 4 October the base of the corridor was secure. The field hospital at Vechel moved to Nijmegen and on 5 October the clearing station followed. The front line had been stabilized in a wide arc across the river Waal with the furthermost point within sight of Arnhem. This salient which became known as the "island" was the next assignment for the 101st and it was one long, grim, demoralizing anticlimax. The paratroopers dug in. On clear days the Germans on the rising ground north of the river could look down the Americans' throats. On dull days they shot at random. Jet planes began to make their appearance. V-2's raced through the skies. Bombs fell intermittently on Nijmegen. Everybody was miserable.

On 29 October in the fog of a particularly wretched day two bombs fell in the courtyard of the school building where the 326th was operating its station. Walls collapsed. Ceilings caved in. Fire broke out. At the

height of the excitement a rocket struck the same point and caused many additional casualties. This put the 326th out of the running for the time being. The unit was sent to the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Eindhoven to recover and the Third Auxers transferred to the field hospital on the south side of Nijmegen. They stayed there until 14 November, took a brief rest at Third Aux Headquarters in Spa, and rejoined the 101st at Mourmelon. The war was only five months old and yet these men had already survived a number of catastrophes. But the worst was yet to come.

### *The Stalemate*

From the middle of September till the middle of December First Army was held at bay on a front that ran from Aachen in the north to Luxembourg in the south. Here, the remaining German divisions were massed behind a line that presented not only carefully prepared fortifications but also great natural obstacles. It was a line that ran across rolling hills and secluded valleys, lonely moors and dense forests, steep ravines and rushing streams, and to all this the Germans had added dragon's teeth and tank traps, pill boxes and mine fields, road blocks and machine gun emplacements. In the north there were the forests of Rötgen and Hürtgen, the uplands of the Hohe Venn, and the outrunners of the Ardennes. In the south, the hills made way for more open country but unfortunately this was not the logical point of attack. The logical point of attack lay in the north where the Rhine could be approached across the plain of Cologne. In the south, the hills of the Eifel and the Hunsrück were formidable barriers.

In this country that was so easy to defend and so difficult to attack, First Army launched two costly offensives: Aachen and the Roer. The battle for Aachen lasted from

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

2 October till 21 October. The drive for the Roer started on 16 November and was still in progress when the Germans lashed back.

The enemy was now fighting with his back against the wall. Gone were the days when Hitler masterminded the campaigns from his eyrie at Berchtesgaden. In the fall of 1944, the German Army was directed by hard-headed tacticians, men of cold deliberation who exacted an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They knew that the greatest threat was the Roer sector and they acted accordingly. On this sector alone, they deployed twelve of the best German divisions and more tanks than the Americans had. The battle that ensued was a battle of attrition.

Third Auxers watched this battle from such vantage points as Rötgen, Elsenborn, Butgenbach, Stolberg, and Eschweiler. The word vantage point refers here solely to proximity rather than to perspective. The towns and villages facing the Siegfried Line were on the whole a dismal lot and they offered scant hospitality. Between Aachen and St. Vith lay a district that had belonged to Germany before the First World War and the inhabitants were still predominantly German. No longer the open arms, the warm hand shakes, the jubilant expressions of gratitude. These people had no love for the Americans and they showed it. Treachery and ambush were rampant. Early in September, a whole carload of MP's disappeared in Rötgen. Third Auxers wouldn't think of going out alone. Sensenbach had paid for his gullibility. No one wanted to follow in his footsteps.

The field hospitals dug in, and the digging was not good. With the exception of a platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital which installed itself in the elegant summer palace of the Duchess of Luxembourg, winter quarters for the field hospitals ran to dingy school buildings, bombed-out factories, and

smelly horse stables. They all had one thing in common: a bone-chilling dampness that defied everything but the sleeping bag. Of all the improvised dormitories, the most unconventional one was at Rötgen. In this wretched village, Third Auxers pitched their cots in a paint store, fronting directly on the main street. The room had a large window without curtains, permitting all passers-by an unobstructed view of Third Auxers in various stages of dress and undress. The townspeople were shocked. "Das ist doch eine grosze Schande!" they said.

The days followed one another in drab and cheerless monotony. The weather, which had been discouraging throughout the summer except for a few short weeks in August, turned chilly in September, wet in October, and devastating in November. Third Auxers suffered in silence. True, their discomfitures were insignificant compared with those of the men at the front, but the constantly recurring annoyances had a cumulative effect. The crowded quarters, the mess kit routine, the interminable rain, the fearful isolation, these took their toll as the campaign dragged on.

Aachen fell on 21 October and it was on this same day that death reached out from a totally unexpected quarter. It happened at Elsenborn. Let Major Floyd tell the story.

"On 3 October the third platoon of the 45th Field Hospital moved to Elsenborn, a hamlet that was only a few miles from the German-Belgian border. The site had no great strategic importance except as high ground controlling the road that parallels the frontier at this point. Elsenborn was what we would call a wide place in the road. It consisted of half a dozen farm houses and a general store.

Our hospital was set up about three hundred yards from the crossroads. The country

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

was heavily wooded and traversed by many shallow ravines. When we moved in, enemy patrols had been reported in Elsenborn the night before. That made the cheese more binding. Soon other units began to move in, chiefly medium artillery. The guns began to shell the Siegfried Line with great gusto. The earth shook under our feet with the thunderous explosions but we grew used to it. There was fighting at Monschau, three miles to the northeast. But it was small potatoes. Mostly patrol clashes. Our casualties all came from this area.

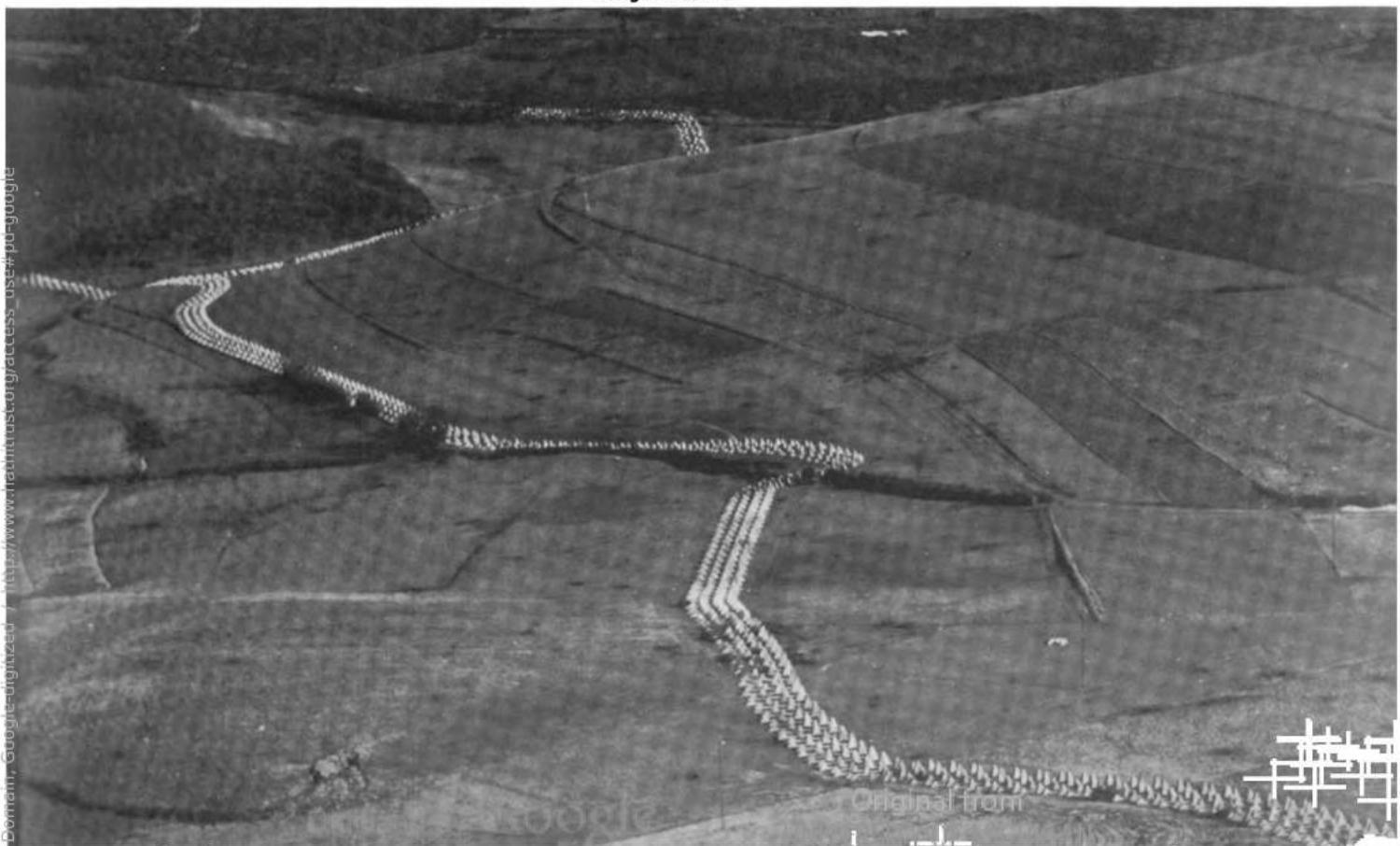
As the days wore on, we were joined by the second platoon. This went into bivouac because there was not enough work for two platoons. The resting platoon had four Third Aux nurses: Joyce Walther, Irene Bovee, Marjorie Bruce, and Gladys Snyder. The third platoon had Mary Benham, Mary Estes, Janet Snyder, and Louise Tomback. Business was so slack that we had only one team, that of Boyden.

We spent the time in monotonous inactivity. The weather was miserably cold and there was a constant drizzle that converted the ground into a quagmire. We were sitting in the middle of buzz-bomb alley and we quickly learned to scan the skies when we heard the peculiar whine. Because of the low overcast, we could never see the blasted things until they were only a few hundred yards away. They appeared to travel very low, not more than three hundred feet above the ground, and they all seemed to be heading for Liège. I never saw one fall near by.

Our sector was considered inactive. It was being held by the 28th Division which was regrouping following the disaster at Schmidt. Camp security was lax. I hadn't dug a fox hole for weeks. Too damn wet. Why sleep in a pool of water when you might just as well sleep on your cot?

On 21 October one of the nurses in the inactive platoon, Frances Slanger, wrote a

Dragon's teeth.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

letter to the Stars and Stripes, putting into words what a lot of us felt. Here is the way she put it:

'It is two o'clock in the morning and I have been lying awake for an hour, listening to the steady, even breathing of the other three nurses in the tent. The rain is beating down on the tent with torrential force. The wind is on a rampage. Its main objective seems to be to lift the tent off its poles and fling it about our heads.

The fire is burning low. Just a few live coals are on the bottom. I couldn't help thinking how similar to a human being a fire is. It can run down very low but if there is a spark of life left, it can be nursed back. So can a human being. It is slow, it is gradual, but it is done all the time in these field hospitals.

We have read articles in the various magazines, praising the work of the nurses in the combat area. Praising us for what? The GI's say we rough it. True, we live in tents, sleep on cots, and are subject to the vagaries of the weather. We wade ankle-deep in the

mud, but they have to lie in it. We have a stove and coal. We even have a laundry line in the tent. Our drawers are at this moment doing the dance of the pants, what with the wind howling, the tent waving, the rain beating, the guns firing, and me writing with a flashlight. It all adds up to a feeling of unreality.

Sure we rough it, but in comparison with the way you men are taking it, we can't complain. You . . . . the men behind the guns, the men driving the tanks, flying the planes, sailing the ships, building the bridges, paving the way, and paying with your blood, you are the ones to whom we doff our helmets. Every GI wearing the American uniform has our greatest admiration and respect.

Yes, this time *we* are handing out the bouquets. We are handing out the bouquets because we have seen you when you are brought in bloody, dirty with mud, and so tired. We are handing out the bouquets because we have gradually seen you brought back to life. We have learned a great deal about our American soldier and the stuff he is made of. The wounded do not cry. Their buddies come first. Your patience and determination, your courage and fortitude are awesome to behold. Rough it? No! It is a privilege to be able to take care of you and it is a great joy to see you open your eyes and say with that swell American grin "Hi Babe!"

We all read this letter. There had been very little to do. The day had offered nothing but scudding clouds, driving rain, and dripping canvas. At night we all congregated in our tent. Art Jones had a bottle of screech and we sampled some of it to drive the gloom away. We felt mighty sorry for ourselves. Then Boyden reminded us that we were living like kings compared with the GI's on patrol. I had just opened my mouth to subscribe to his sentiments when the earth shook with the impact of nearby explosions.



Field hospitals go into winter quarters.  
Merlo watches as Black wields the knife.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

Instinctively I ducked. I remembered a sump hole that I had dug several days earlier for the garbage. Brother, you should have seen me get rid of that garbage!

In the inactive platoon, Frances Slanger and the other nurses put their helmets on and huddled together, not knowing which way to turn. Terrified, they kneeled with their arms around each other. The third shell fell in the middle of their area. Frances Slanger collapsed. 'I'm hit,' she said.

In another tent Major Herman Lord, the platoon commander, was mortally wounded. An enlisted man was killed outright. Three more nurses had been hit: Elizabeth Powers and Margaret Bowler of the platoon, and Gladys Snyder of the Third Aux. The casualties were brought to the operating tent. I left my sump hole and we all turned to the wounded.

Frances Slanger was the most serious. She had a wound of the abdomen and was al-

ready in deep shock when we first saw her. She knew that she was dying but her only concern was with the others. We poured blood into her as fast as we could. It was no use. Within half an hour, Frances Slanger was dead. We buried her in a military cemetery where she lies side by side with the fighting men she served."

While the teams were thus being buffeted by the fortunes of war, Third Aux Headquarters finally settled down in surroundings befitting its dignity. This was in Spa. Up until this time, the little group had jumped from one cow pasture to another, trying to keep up with the lines. In August, a new executive officer reported. In September, Lieutenant Sensenbach disappeared. To fill his place, no less than three new MAC officers joined the Third Aux. One of these was soon dropped again but two continued:

Nathalie Davis and Irving Hayman work over a casualty at the 13th Field Hospital in Eschweiler.



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

Harold Hansen as adjutant and Dwight De-Witt as supply officer. In December Sergeant Brattesanni was promoted to Second Lieutenant MAC and he continued to serve the Group in his usual affable manner.

When the lines finally stabilized, Colonel Crisler installed Headquarters in a handsome villa south of Spa. This villa had a past. Serving alternately as a German Brigade Headquarters and an aristocratic Belgian residence, it eventually became the home of a group of *Ehrebrauten*. Ehrebrauten were girls from the occupied territories who were sent to the front to consort with German soldiers. The traffic blossomed so that, at one time, four train-loads of this type of cargo would pass through Spa every day. When the "bride" became pregnant, she was well cared for until the baby was born. Then the honeymoon was over. Boy babies were sent to Germany to be brought up in the Nazi tradition. Girl babies were left with

the mother who received a cash settlement of a thousand marks for her travail.

The brides at Spa had done very well for themselves. Their villa had every comfort of home besides a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. Third Auxers took up where the brides left off. They turned on the central heating plant, they transformed the library into an orderly room, and they even gave a dance. It was attended by every Spa girl whose political antecedents had been found above reproach by that Third Aux factotum, Captain William Selkin.

Spa was taken over lock, stock, and barrel by the Americans. Situated on the border of the Hohe Venn, the town had not only a charming location but also renowned mineral springs. Full of hotels, it was a natural for First Army Headquarters. GI's were everywhere. The famous casino, the imposing bathhouse, the exclusive restaurants, nothing was exempt. The same plushy salons

Jeep ambulance. Bringing out a casualty at Monschau.



## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

that once held the ailing uppercrust of Europe now became filled with swaggering dough boys whose only complaint was that they had not had a bath for weeks. To see these rugged characters line up in front of the ticket window at the *Maison des Bains* was a terrific jolt to the native attendants who had not witnessed anything like it even during the First World War when the Kaiser made his headquarters in Spa. "C'est formidable," they would say, shaking their heads.

Since times immemorial the springs of Spa have gushed forth an estimated twenty thousand gallons of effervescent, chocolate-colored water a day. At the *Maison*, this water is stored, heated, and piped to a variety of tub baths, shower cabinets, steam chambers, whirlpools, needle sprays, and all the other appurtenances of hydrotherapy. Besides these, the *Maison* had a huge swimming pool, a stately *salle de repos*, a glass rotunda, a restaurant, a bar, an art collection, massage rooms, gambling facilities, barber shops, and a corps of professional masseurs. Third Auxers sampled them all but the thing they enjoyed the most, after five months of helmet-baths, was the good old tub. At this stage, a tub bath was the height of luxury. In a tub, a man could forget all about the mud and dirt and grime of the field. He could close his eyes and let himself be carried off to a land of warmth and motion where everything conspired to relaxation. It was like smoking opium and it was worth every bit of fifteen francs.

After Aachen came the abortive attack on the Roer dams. When that failed, the Allies decided on a carefully coordinated attack all along the West Wall. The strategy was to engage the enemy in the north and in the south and to strike a body blow in the center. First Army was in the center. The objective was the Hurtgen Forest and the Roer dams. The jump-off came on 16 November.

Weather and terrain could hardly have been worse. Harassed by a constant downpour, the troops found themselves in a forest so dense that visibility was cut to thirty yards. Pill boxes covered every foot of ground. Air support was impossible. Every strong point had to be taken by frontal attack, a heartbreaking struggle in which even the best troops bogged down. The Germans knew exactly where the Americans were and plastered the line with tree bursts that took a heavy toll. The very job of getting the wounded out of this hell hole required superhuman strength. Third Auxers noted that it now took twenty-four to thirty-six hours for a casualty to reach them. These conditions were reminiscent of the First World War.

At the end of two weeks the Americans stood on the far edge of the forest but their trials were not over. Every village was fiercely contested. This was the kind of fighting that was epitomized in the follow-



Gladys Snyder recuperating at Spa.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

ing communiqué: "The Americans have entered a house in Schmidt. They have established Headquarters in the living room and sent reconnaissance parties to the kitchen and the bedrooms. There is no word as yet from these parties." The offensive ground to a halt during the second week of December. Losses had run as high as six hundred per division per day. First Army needed reinforcements. Moreover, the troops now stood on the banks of the Roer and what they saw was not a shallow stream but a mile-wide lake. The Germans had opened the flood gates. They were playing their last ace.

During these weeks, everybody in the Third Aux suffered from acute frustration.

Rumors were rampant. Periodically, reports would circulate that within a short time all men with a certain length of service would be sent home. The catch was that the critical score kept receding like a mirage. At first, eighteen months overseas was supposed to put a man in line for repatriation. When Third Auxers passed this point, the period had already been extended to twenty-four months. In December, the Group celebrated its second year overseas with the news that the critical score had now been extended to thirty months! The repatriation scheme was just a come-on, a will-of-the-wisp, an ignis fatuus.

The next best thing to hope for was a two-day pass to one of the leave centers such



Third Aux Headquarters at Spa.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

as Liège or Paris (Brussels was for the British) or, better yet, a thirty-day exchange with some hospital in the rear. The exchange plan was worked out by Colonel Crisler in an effort to give Third Auxers a broader view of war surgery. After six months at the front, the surgeons knew all about the immediate care of battle casualties but they had never had a chance to follow up on their work. The only way to do that was to go to the general hospitals of the communications zone. Accordingly, a rotation scheme was put into effect. Third Auxers would change places with their confrères at the base on a thirty-day basis. The first men left early in December.

On the whole, the men from the base came off second best. They were not used to the rugged life at the front and several of them went completely to pieces under the strain. One man reported to Third Aux Headquaters on 16 December. He was told to proceed to Butgenbach. When he got there, the hospital was just being abandoned in a pell-mell flight. It was the worst kind of a how-do-you-do he could have had. The poor fellow dropped his baggage, jumped on a truck, and got away by the skin of his teeth. He was never the same after that.

Even the two-day pass to Paris was no longer an unmitigated pleasure. The trip was rough and the city had lost its glamor. Torp found out about that.

Torp's job was to pick up the monthly liquor allotment. Usually these trips led him to some out-of-the-way place where nobody would go of his own volition, but in November word came down that henceforth all liquor was to be picked up in Paris! Torp jumped a foot. He had never been to Paris. This was his chance. With commendable foresight he selected the smoothest jeep and the steadiest driver he could find.

From Spa to Paris by jeep in a single day is a tour de force. The roads were bumpy,

the detours interminable, and the weather detestable. But Torp would brook no delay. Every hour on the road meant an hour less in Paris. The driver did his best. Slithering over the wretched *pavés* like a hunted gazelle, the jeep raced through the rain and when it finally drew up on the Place de la Concorde, Torp was whipped. Now for a place to eat and sleep.

The only way to get a room in Paris was to apply at the billeting officer. This gentleman was very obliging but he had his orders: general officers to the Champs Elysées, field grade officers to the Rue de Rivoli, company grade officers to the Faubourg. Torp was only a captain. His billeting slip read 89 bis, Rue St. Antoine. The driver could stay at the Red Cross and the truck would have to be taken to the parking lot at the Hotel des Invalides. By the time everybody was settled, the hour was late and Torp was eating K rations in his unheated room on the fifth floor of the dumpy Hotel St. Antoine. This was no time to start slumming. Exhausted, he went to bed.

Always a man to take care of business first, Torp started out bright and early the next day. His job was not as simple as it seemed. By noon he had called at three different warehouses. The first one handled champagne only, the second one was closed



Hurwitz and Smazal in action. Kornfield on the left.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

for the day, and the third one could not honor his requisition because it did not have the right signature. Torp decided to suspend further efforts until he could get one of those tasty Parisian lunches he had heard so much about. Then he had another surprise. The only place to eat in Paris was at the Army mess on the Place d'Augustine. On the way down there, the driver had to change a tire and when that was fixed, the mess was closed. Torp and his driver ate K rations in the jeep.

There was one last ray of hope. Perhaps if he went to the Seine Base Section Liquor Officer. The man was cooperative enough and gave him the address of yet another warehouse, this one in Versailles. They drove as fast as they could. Torp could actually smell the whiskey when he got out of the jeep. The first thing he saw was a sign: ALL SALES STOPPED UNTIL AFTER CHRISTMAS. It was no use. The Third Aux would have to go dry.

With his mission now a dead issue, Torp

felt that he could devote the rest of the day to extracurricular activities. Laboriously the men made their way back to the Hotel des Invalides. They parked their car and Torp immediately took a taxi to the Place de l'Opera. The sidewalks were crowded but not too crowded for Torp to see what he was looking for: the Café de la Paix. Pushing his way through the throngs, he managed to find an empty table and ordered his cognac. This was the life. Just look at all those interesting characters. Before he knew it, he was in conversation with an extremely glib and voluble Frenchman who gave himself out to be a theatrical director.

"Have a drink," said Torp after the first greetings were over.

Torp did not know much French and the Frenchman did not know much English. The cognacs took care of that. Within a few minutes, the newly-found friend offered to take Torp on a personally conducted tour of the Paris night spots. Torp got so excited that he forgot all about his empty stomach

Taking out the dead. The Hurtgen Forest on 26 November.



## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

and feigned great interest in a long story about the woes of life in Paris.

They set out in the early evening. They started at Le Chat Noir and wound up at Maxim's. Everywhere it was the same story: Queues at the bar, liquor at fifty francs a thimblefull, women at a premium, and the guide at odds with the waiters. After innumerable cognacs and innumerable stories about the scarcity of cigarettes, Torp was weak from hunger and very unsteady on his feet. At this point, the guide excused himself and forgot to return. Torp slumped. Suddenly he felt very forlorn. There was nothing he really wanted to do but to go home. But where was home? The only place he could remember was the parking lot on the other side of the river. He staggered out.

"Fiacre!"

A taxi screeched to a halt.

"Hotel des Invalides."

"Oui monsieur."

Torp does not remember much of that last taxi trip. He got to the parking lot, found his jeep, and spent the rest of the night on the back seat. His two days in Paris had yielded nothing but frustration. When he finally got back to Headquarters, his only comment was: "Paris . . . ? Bah. I wouldn't give you a nickel for the place!"

As the winter progressed, conditions everywhere deteriorated. The barracks at Vielsalm were a good example. Here is one Third Auxer's description of life at Vielsalm.

"Our present home is a Belgian casern. Or rather, it *was* a casern. The Germans messed it up a bit. They dropped a few eggs and the artillery did the rest. From the outside, it looked pretty grim. But who were we to be particular? Thankful for any kind of shelter, we moved in.

We started arranging an operating room.

Bringing casualties in. This was near Eschweiler.





Kay Watry and Madeleine Andreko on Paris leave. Here they check in at the hotel. Note the SOS insignia on the bell-boy's uniform.

Resting up from the truck ride. Gee—those beds feel good.

Sprucing up.



Now let's see what Paris looks like.

First stop is at the Px. The girls admire a silk slip.

Notre Dame. The girls are beginning to get foot-sore.



Let's take a fiacre.

Fishermen on the banks of the Seine. It's dark but not too dark to see a strike.

Homeward bound. A gendarme comes to the rescue.

## FROM NORMANDY TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

First, the men chopped the ice off the floor. Then they covered the windows. Then they installed the pot-bellied stoves. Then they sent a truck for coal. The situation seemed to be in hand. Alas! The heat melted the ice, the ceiling began to drip, and water streamed down in such quantities that everybody slopped around in arctics for days.

At this point, the artillery moved in and with each blast of the cannon, the stoves would spew forth great billows of soot and smoke. With visibility thus reduced, it was several days before we noticed a big hole in the far corner. We investigated and found an unexploded shell. The engineers took care of that. They also strung electric wire and installed telephones. But when the first casualties arrived, the ceiling still dripped, the floor still steamed, and the stoves still belched.

Without our pot-bellied stoves, we would have been sunk. In the early fall we captured a German stove. It was a work of art. It stood five feet high, had all sorts of filigree work, and weighed a ton. But it was a stinker. Pound for pound, the little Sibley stove was the champ.

The stoves at Vielsalm worked overtime. One of them almost wrecked the place. Somebody filled a jerrycan with water and set it on the red hot stove. A jerrycan has a lid that clamps down automatically. For awhile, all went well. Then came the explosion. The thing popped with the noise of an Oerlikon. A geyser of steam and boiling water filled the room. We could all have been scalded to death. As it was, the only damage was material. The jerrycan was all twisted out of shape and the lid was lost. We found it later. It was stuck in the ceiling.

Actually, it would have been hard to create greater havoc than already existed. At no time could we have passed a Saturday morning inspection. Let me try to give you some idea of our living room.

This room was quite large. It measured probably about twenty by forty feet and yet every square inch of space was occupied. The first things to attract attention were two large tables. From a distance, each table appeared to stagger under a great miscellany of articles, but on closer scrutiny, one could see that there had been some attempt at segregation. The first table was equipped as a quick lunch counter, the other one contained only mental food. Both were stacked in layers, pyramid fashion.

A partial inventory of the first table ran about like this: four half-empty liquor bottles, a sugar bowl, a jar with Ovaltine tablets, a tin labeled Dixie Mix, a can with condensed milk, a greasy spoon, a jug with moldy mayonnaise, two canteen cups (both dirty), a medicine glass, two jiggers, a can of spam (unopened), a carton of Hershey's breakfast cocoa, a saucer with decomposing butter, a huge box of homemade cookies, a marmalade jar with a spoon sticking out of it, a plate with two dried-out pieces of toast and a slab of salami, a wicked knife, two can openers, a cellophane package with dried prunes, a box of matches (empty), the remains of a fruit cake, a china cup (clean), a china cup (dirty), two cartons of vanilla wafers, a chunk of nougat, a jar with sandwich spread, a cracked glass, a tin with Terry's cream mints, a mess kit surmounted by a soup plate, a bag of salted peanuts, half a loaf of bread, a bottle of Nescafe, a one-gallon can of fruit juice, a dainty little platter with anchovy paste, something wrapped in an old newspaper, a glass container with strawberry preserves, ditto with bouillon paste, ditto with Parmesan cheese, a corkscrew, an envelope with dried noodle soup, a box with Koffee Krunch, two GI knives, a bottle with dill pickles, a jug labeled Araban Mixture, and a small serving tray with nothing but a blackened spoon.

The second table was only slightly less fascinating. It held old magazines, overseas

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editions of the funnies, maps of Belgium, V-mail letters, hometown newspapers, writing materials, playing cards, half-smoked cigars, pony editions, a chess board, numerous ash trays, discarded razor blades, strips of adhesive tape, a damp wash cloth, a Coleman lantern, a pair of socks, a bottle of calamine lotion, a tobacco pouch, and, in general, the overflow from the first table.

Lined up against the walls were the cots, each one with its own array of rumpled sleeping bags, heaped-up blankets, opened valpaks, and sprawling bedding-rolls. There were also six different kinds of chairs. These were used mainly as towel racks and clothes hangers. Nobody did much sitting. One stood or lay down.

The corners served special functions. The first corner was the wash and clean-up department. It had the jerrycans, several enameled basins, a canvas bucket, some drinking cups, and six empty plasma cans for emergency purposes. This corner was always partly inundated and no man approached it without his arctics on.

The second corner was the storage department. It contained the tents, poles, pegs, ropes, flies, shovels, axes, wires, tarpaulins, and all the other necessities of outdoor living. These articles had been acquired by hook and crook and were being zealously guarded, even though they had long since outlived their usefulness.

The third corner housed the laundry department. Here, the space was completely taken up by crisscrossing wires and dangling underwear. Most of the men were down to a few shorts. The washer women of Normandy had helped themselves to the desir-

able items and the Quartermaster laundry had taken care of the rest.

The fourth corner was the social department. It had the stove, two coal scuttles, an ash can, rows of steaming shoes, a wall map of the battlefield, a pile of old newspapers, and a broken-down stool. Here the off-duty team gathered for a round of chess, a swipe at the lunch counter, or a look at last month's magazines.

And yet, this dreary spot boasted of one great natural wonder, a sort of Carlsbad Caverns in miniature. This was the washroom. Just before we moved in, it had been hit by a shell. Pipes had sprung leaks. Water had seeped out. As it seeped, it froze and as it froze, it assumed an infinite variety of weird shapes. The result was the most fantastic collection of stalagmites and stalactites you ever saw.

I stumbled onto the place in the dark. Not knowing where I was, I flashed on my light. By the flickering beam, each bizarre formation created its own grotesque shadow. A thousand fanciful figures danced about me. It was a fairyland beyond the wildest Disney dream. I took a deep breath and joined the chess players in the dormitory.

Such was Vielsalm."

For three weary months, the stalemate dragged on. The Russians were stalled in the east. The British and the Americans were stalled in the west. There seemed to be no way out. Then, at the most unexpected moment, the air was rent with the flash of guns and the clash of tanks. The Battle of the Bulge was on.







## Chapter X



### The Battle of the Bulge

The Battle of the Bulge has been called the greatest battle the American Army ever fought and there is no doubt that in ferocity, in casualties, and in numbers engaged, it ranks first. The Bulge began on 16 December, reached its climax on 26 December, and was obliterated on 23 January. During those thirty-eight days, the Germans lost over 150,000 men and the Americans 136,000. Truly an appalling price.

The plan had been very carefully worked out by the German High Command. As early as September the German Staff had decided to mass all the newly activated divisions into a new assault group and this gradually grew into the Sixth Panzer Army. Early in October, the site was chosen. It was to be the sector between Monschau and Trier, the very ground where German armor achieved its greatest triumph in 1940. Early in November, Hitler said: "We will strike a blow of great daring and subtle strategy where the enemy least expects it. We will depend on surprise and speed. We will probe for the soft spots, rush for the Meuse, and seize Antwerp. Then, we will annihilate the British to the north and the Americans to the south." Early in December, the die was cast. Like a wounded animal that strikes out in the agony of death, Hitler's legions surged forward and demolished everything in their path. Theirs was a vengeance mission, a retribution for the painful defeats in Normandy, the slow attrition of the Sieg-

fried Line, the dreadful destruction of the German Fatherland from the air.

At the time of the attack, the Monschau-Trier sector was lightly held by VIII Corps, consisting of the 106th Division in the north, the 28th Division in the center, and the 4th Division in the south. Of these, the 106th was green and the other two were severely depleted by weeks of heavy fighting at the Roer. The extreme northern boundary of the sector was guarded by the 4th Cavalry Group. Two combat commands of the 9th Armored were resting at St. Vith. Fifty miles of front, held by three divisions! Against this thin crust, the Germans hurled two Panzer Armies and part of a third: 22 divisions, 250,000 men, and 1,200 tanks. It was their last desperate gamble.

On 16 December, the field hospitals that were directly in the path of the German advance were:

- (1) The third platoon of the 47th Field Hospital at Butgenbach with the teams of Peyton and Dorner.
- (2) The first platoon of the 47th Field Hospital at Waymes with the teams of Hurwitz and Higginbotham.
- (3) The third platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital at St. Vith with the teams of Partington and Lavieri.
- (4) The second platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital at Wiltz with the teams of Serbst and Sutton. (Sutton himself had gone on a thirty-day exchange. His place was taken by Cameron.)

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The battle started at five o'clock in the morning with an artillery barrage. It was a murky, drizzly morning and the Americans took their punishment in wet, muddy foxholes. At eight o'clock German tanks and infantry started forward over a fifty-mile front. Some of these attacks were diversionary however. The main pressure fell on the northern flank, between St. Vith and Elsenborn. Here, the enemy penetrated the positions of the 4th Cavalry Group three miles in as many hours. Through the right of the 106th Division, German armor advanced rapidly for a mile and a half before being slowed by Division reserves. The objective was St. Vith. St. Vith held out but at other points the Americans were sent reeling. Two whole regiments of the 106th were cut off. There was no defense in depth. Everything depended on rapid shifting of reserves.

Against the 28th Division in the Wiltz sector, the enemy used two Panzer Divisions, three infantry divisions, and one parachute division. The 28th was especially over-extended, covering almost thirty miles of front. Before nightfall the Germans had crossed the ridge road at several points and advanced as much as five miles.

In the southern part of VIII Corps, there were local attacks against the positions of the 4th Division but these were not a serious threat. The real pressure bore down on Malmedy in the north, St. Vith in the center, and Wiltz in the south.

On this first day Third Auxers could only guess what was going on but they got a pretty good idea from the stories of the casualties.

At Butgenbach, an ambulance of the 2nd Division Clearing Station brought a man with a superficial arm wound to the field hospital. Peyton smelled a rat.

"What's this? Don't you have a clearing station any more?"

"Sorry, sir. We are pulling out right away and we haven't got an ambulance to take this man all the way to Malmédy."

"All right. Put him down. But if your clearing station is at Malmédy, what are we doing out here?"

At St. Vith, Partington and his men were suddenly swamped with wounded of the 106th Division. He couldn't understand it.

"What's going on, boys?"

"Plenty. They are coming at us with nothing but tanks."

"Well, you better go to your clearing station!"

"But that's all the way in Vielsalm!"

"Vielsalm! You mean your clearing station is at Vielsalm! That puts *us* in front of your battalion aid station!" And Partington gravely shook his head.

At Wiltz, Serbst felt sufficiently disturbed to go to the Command Post of the 28th Division and ask for information.

"Looks like those bastards are trying to come through at Wallendorf," said the intelligence officer. "Wish we could get some bombers in the air." But by the time the request reached the liaison officer, darkness had settled and the bombers never took off. Serbst returned to his teammates, profoundly disturbed.

The next day, 17 December, the Germans drove hard to exploit their initial penetrations. Contrary to a popular misconception, their objective was not Liège but rather the Meuse south of that city. On the northern shoulder, the 106th was in full retreat and by nine o'clock the two regiments in front of St. Vith were cut off. Butgenbach and Malmédy were being defended by elements of the 2nd and the 99th Division without the weapons to counter the heavy tank concentrations. In the 28th Division sector, the Germans made large gains everywhere. One salient north of Wiltz was eight miles deep

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and another south of the village extended for six miles. At some points, German armor was only eleven miles from Bastogne. This was where the greatest penetrations were made during the next few days.

Let us now see what happened to Third Auxers along the perimeter of the Bulge.

### *The Teams of Majors Peyton and Dorner*

On the morning of 17 December, the third platoon of the 47th Field Hospital at Butgenbach was still completely unaware of the danger that threatened it. The hospital had arrived only a few days before and had established itself in a battered schoolhouse without light or heat. Third Aux teams here were as follows:

Major John B. Peyton, Capt Hollis H.

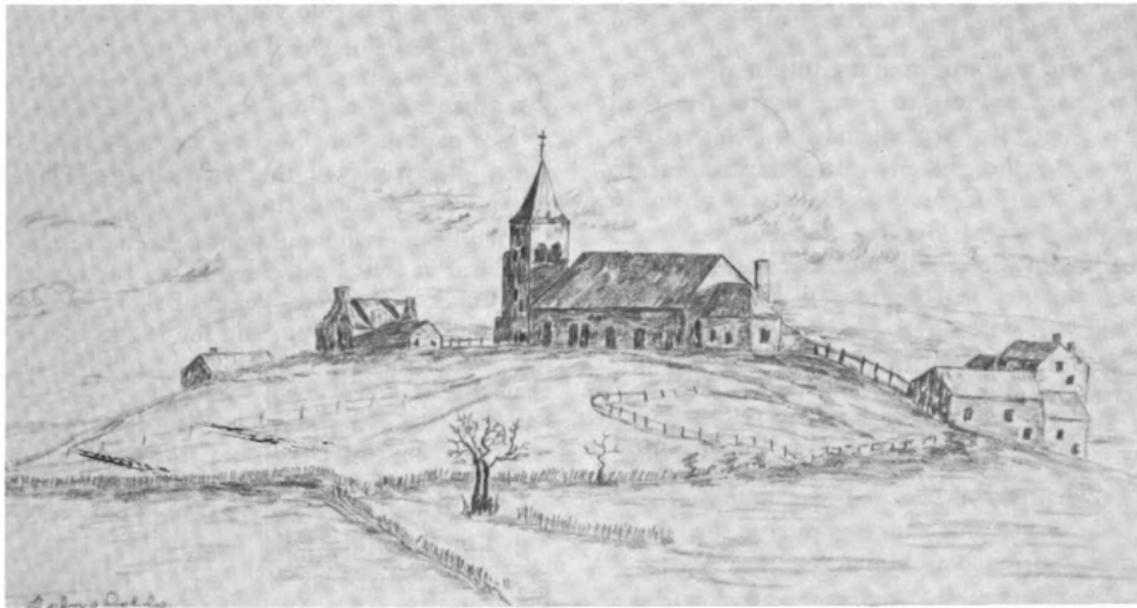
Brainard, Capt Claude M. Warren, Capt Max Hughes, T-5 John L. Myers, T-5 Emery W. Hopkins, T-5 Thomas A. Geurink, Pvt William Faskow.

Major Ralph A. Dorner, Capt John A. Esposito, Capt Edward H. Roberts, Capt Gordon A. Dodds, T-5 Charles A. Bonin, T-5 Edward M. Pawlowicz, T-5 James A. Bowman, T-4 Aurelio M. DeLeon.

The nurses were Peggy Baker, Marge Harvey, Shirley Ralph, and Ida Marsh.

Captain Warren has recorded what took place.

"All during the night of 16 December we heard tanks and trucks going past our buildings but to our surprise they were all heading away from the front! We knew that a battle was going on but we could not



The church at Hornay in the Ardennes.

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understand why the tanks were running away from it. Some of our men became greatly worried. After all, we were only a few miles from the line. But to most of us it was just a joke. If the Jerries did come through, we could get out in a hurry and our troops would chase them back in short order.

At midnight we admitted a soldier with a traumatic amputation of both legs. He was in profound shock and we spent the rest of the night working over him. At seven in the morning, he was just beginning to respond. I was dead tired. I went down to eat a cold breakfast and got ready to go to bed. Dorner's team was taking over. At this moment we heard small-arms fire down the road and we all ran out. Jeeps were racing by, each one loaded to the gills. A wave of excitement gripped us. The battle was coming to our door! I was thrilled. This was the stuff we had been waiting for these many months.

There was a temporary lull in the traffic. The next vehicle to come down the road was a bicycle, propelled by a Belgian boy. He was yelling bloody murder and pointing at his foot. Captain Peckins was the only one who knew German and he questioned the boy in the middle of the street. The boy said that he had been shot by a German soldier five hundred yards down the road. The bullet lodged in his boot but did not penetrate the skin.

Some of us became panicky but I thought 'What the hell? If they capture us, we may be exchanged and actually get home earlier.' I did not get much time to pursue this pleasant trend of thought.

A radar truck came speeding down the road. There was a sharp bend where our building was. The truck was going too fast, careened off the highway, and came to rest in a ditch. I ran out through the slush. The

driver was already out of his cab, surveying the damage.

'How does it look up front, captain?' I tried to be casual.

He looked up, annoyed. 'Rough. Got out just in time.' Then, noticing my unsoldierly appearance, he added 'What are you doing here?'

'We are running the hospital.'

'The hospital? You mean you are running a hospital out here? You better get yourself some guns or you will be operating on Heinies. Bullangen is full of them.'

I knew that Bullangen was only a mile away and I swallowed hard.

At this point Major Henderson, the platoon commander, came over. Before he could open his mouth, the captain spoke up.

'Better step back, Major. I'm going to set this truck on fire.'

'On fire? What do you mean? That truck is worth money, isn't it?'

'I don't care, as long as the Jerries don't lay a hand on it.'

The captain and his men set to immediately. They placed thermite charges. The truck started smoldering.

Henderson still would not believe the captain. But at least he decided to get the nurses out. Our girls were Peggy Baker, Marge Harvey, Shirley Ralph, and Ida Marsh. They left without anything but the clothes on their backs. Everything had to go in one ambulance. No room for baggage. They went to the 2nd Division Clearing Station at Elsenborn. Later we heard that they were safely evacuated from there.

I still did not think that the Germans would reach us. So, like a fool, I did not pack a thing. I did not even pick up my watch or a fountain pen or a ring that I had pulled off while operating. At eight o'clock Lieutenant Colonel Cook, 2nd Division Surgeon, came in. He was so out of

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breath that he could hardly talk. He yelled at Henderson: 'Get everybody out of here and damn quick. The Germans are coming down the road!'

We now had only two vehicles left and they were supposed to be for the patients. I ran upstairs in a fog, half-scared, half-thrilled. I was sure that we would be back by nightfall. I grabbed my movie camera and some film but left the rest. The panic was contagious. Everybody ran out on the road.

The first people to get there were Peyton and Brainard. They hadn't even bothered to pick up their belongings. They looked down the road and saw a truck coming at them.

'There's our chance!' shouted Peyton. 'Let's flag him.'

The driver stopped. Peyton and Brainard jumped on. There was no room in the cab so they crouched low in the body. Down the road they went, slithering and swaying. The shooting seemed to get closer all the time. Peyton scrambled to his feet and raised his voice above the tumult:

'Hey, driver! Where are you taking us?'

'Bullangen. I want to get my buddies out!'

'Hell's bells! Let me out. We are just medics!'

Peyton and Brainard got out of that truck so fast, they completely forgot about their overcoats. They hid in a ditch, dodged bullets all morning, and managed to hitch a ride later.

Meanwhile the rest of us were straggling down the road towards Waymes. We clambered aboard any vehicle that was going our way. Within an hour we had all gathered at Waymes. Our patients had preceded us. The fellow with both legs shot off was in poor shape again and I started blood on him. Our teams were being ordered to the 44th Evacuation Hospital at Malmédy. The

hospital was sending fifteen of its men to the same point. That made a total of thirty-one and all we had was one ambulance and one water-truck! I still don't know how we did it. We were jammed closer than sardines. The water-truck had twenty men clinging to its sides. The Third Aux was in retreat all right.

From Waymes to Malmédy is only a few miles. At the halfway point, we passed the spot where the road to St. Vith turns off. It was now about noon and the area was deserted. Two hours later, Battery B of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion passed the same spot. This time, tanks of the 1st Panzer Division were coming up. The tanks opened fire and quickly subdued the Americans who had only small arms. The Americans were herded into a field by the side of the road. There were about two hundred of them. A German private in a command car stood up and fired two shots into the group. Immediately, machine guns opened up. They raked the field back and forth. The Americans were mowed down in a matter of seconds. Only a few survived. This was the notorious Malmédy massacre. We missed Malmédy by just two hours!

In Malmédy we found the 44th Evac and the 67th Evac set up in school buildings. Rifle and machine gun fire could be heard everywhere. We learned that German bombers had been over and that the road to Eupen had been cut by paratroopers. Everybody was in a dither. No one knew what to do or where to go. A tank commander stopped his tank and asked me if I knew which way he should go! I told him to keep right on going and he would see plenty of Germans.

We knew the 44th Evac quite well. It was being commanded by Colonel Blatt. The hospital had been only moderately busy and there was adequate help. For a moment, things seemed to be quiet and we all went upstairs to take a nap. Dorner and his men came in soon afterwards. But Dorner was

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disgusted. He was sweating out orders to report to Oxford where his hospital was located and he had had enough of the war. 'Call me if the Krauts come down the street,' he said as he let himself down on his cot, dressed in nothing but his shorts. A moment later, he was fast asleep.

We did not have to wake him up. The racket was terrific. Word spread like wild-fire: 'The Germans are on the way! Everybody get out under his own power!' That was about two o'clock, the very time of the massacre. We all sat up and looked at one another. There was no longer any desire to be a hero. We had lost every piece of property we owned and we knew that the stuff was gone for good. We were in a tight spot.

The entire 44th Evac poured out on the street, Bud Dorner at the head. He didn't even take time to put on his shirt and was running at a dog trot in his shorts. At any other time, we would have laughed ourselves silly because Bud is a big fellow and he was struggling to get into his pants as he ran. Pretty soon, Colonel Blatt raced by, shouting at the top of his voice: 'Hurry up! They are coming down the road!' I'll never forget the scene.

The 44th made its way to Spa on foot and by truck. Our team was instructed to proceed to Luxembourg without delay. That was a little too far to walk, so the 134th Medical Group (an administrative outfit functioning under Corps) supplied us with a truck. We loaded quickly and headed out. Our road lay through Stavelot. We were going like a bat out of hell and I thought that our driver was doing a bang-up job. I congratulated him on his dexterity. 'Thanks, Captain,' he said. 'This is the first time I have driven one of these!'

About halfway to Stavelot, we were stopped by an American tank. We inquired. 'Get back where you came from,' was the advice. 'The Germans have a road block up

ahead.' We raced back. Again we missed disaster by inches. Later that same afternoon, a convoy carrying the 134th Medical Group was bombed and two doctors, one of whom I knew well, were killed.

We reached Spa again at about four o'clock and listened to Headquarters for a while. They laughed at the idea that *they* might have to retreat. The next day they damn well did. All the way to Huy! I had some mail and Christmas packages waiting for me and grabbed them on the run. Then, Colonel Crisler called us in and gravely told us that we were to go to Bastogne forthwith. 'The Germans are everywhere,' he said. 'Use your best judgment.' Bastogne? The name did not mean anything to us.

We left late in the afternoon. It was almost dark. We could have gone all the way to Liège but we decided to take the direct route, through Malmédy and St. Vith. This was the day that the 7th Armored was trying to get through to St. Vith. The traffic congestion was unbelievable. Everywhere, the tanks of the 7th Armored ran head-on into the fleeing troops of the 106th. At one point a major, fighting mad, told his tank drivers to keep on going, even if it meant pushing the oncoming vehicles off the road. It was no use. The tanks were stalled.

South of St. Vith, the roads were strangely deserted. We did not know what to make of it but kept on going as fast as we dared in the black-out. Suddenly, we saw a bright glow ahead. It was a farmhouse that had been set on fire. I figured that we'd better turn around and get back to St. Vith. The road was narrow here and, to help our inexperienced driver, I got out. There was a side-road and I motioned the driver to back into it. Then, just as I told him to turn his wheels, there was a roar of engines and three dark shapes loomed up out of the darkness. Tanks! The situation was such that the tank

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drivers were blinded by the fire in the distance whereas I had the advantage of looking at them with the light in my back. Even so, I could see no more than a faint outline. The lead tank was advancing at a pretty good clip. I thought that he would crowd our truck off the road and so I ran towards him, swinging my arms and shouting at the top of my voice. He could not hear me but he saw me and he throttled his engine. He said something that did not make sense. Then I had a terrific shock: he was talking German!

Suddenly the whole desperate situation dawned on me. These were German tanks and the only reason they had not opened fire was that they took us to be Germans too! They were now not more than twenty yards away and I had to think fast. If I said something in English, we would be discovered and we never would have gotten out alive. I had to continue the deception. But how? The only German word I knew was "Ja." I had no choice. Mustering my last bit of strength, I shouted back 'Ja, ja, ja!' Then, without waiting for an answer, I ran back towards our truck and told the driver to step on it. He excelled himself. We shot out of the side road, caromed around the corner, and beat it. We didn't even look back. Quickly we outdistanced the tanks.

When we arrived in Bastogne it was midnight. Just twenty-four short hours since we received the first alarm! Brother, we had had it."

These men pulled out of Bastogne the next day and joined the third platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital in Luxembourg. The story now returns to the first platoon of the 47th Field Hospital at Waymes on that same eventful 17 December.

### *The Teams of Majors Hurwitz and Higginbotham*

The Third Aux teams at Waymes were as follows:

Major Alfred Hurwitz, Capt Albert W. Brown, Capt Silas A. Coffin, Capt Anthony Noto, T-4 George G. Reedy, T-4 Marvin R. Wormington, T-5 James E. Battles, Pfc William Konikoff.

Major James M. Higginbotham, Major J. Russell Smith, Capt Mark Wallfield, Capt Julius Hersh, T-5 Claris W. Dixon, T-5 Edward H. Fitzpatrick, T-5 Arville E. Shanholtzer, T-5 Jan Prys.

Third Aux nurses were Norine Webster, Reba Greer, Mabel Jessop, and Mary Murphy. Let Mabel Jessop speak.

"When we went to breakfast on the morning of 17 December, we all knew that there was a push on. But even our commanding officer was completely in the dark about the seriousness of the situation. The only source of news we had was the battle



Noto, Hurwitz, Al Brown, Smaul, Battles,  
Reedy, Glaud Smith.

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casualty. His words carry the weight and authority of the eye witness but they are distorted by personal emotions. It is a worm's eye view. Nevertheless, we all eagerly questioned the soldiers that were brought to us during the early hours of that day. They were men from the 2nd Division and the 99th Division and they were in a state of acute jitters. Most of them had been forced to retreat before an overwhelming force of tanks on the Elsenborn moors.

At about nine o'clock there was a sudden influx of patients and personnel from the platoon at Butgenbach (this was the flight that has been related by Captain Warren). Then we knew that things looked bad. We made a half-hearted attempt to be cheerful and started looking after the new arrivals as best we could. Very soon orders came to transfer all patients to the 67th Evacuation Hospital at Malmédy. Yet, we ourselves were to stay and operate the hospital! Evidently we were considered expendable. Next, Peyton and Dorner's teams were ordered out. This only heightened our anxiety. The noon hour came and went, but nobody could eat. The food was the usual cold, tasteless mixture of canned hamburger and dehydrated potatoes. Why eat when you might have to run for your life? It is better not to be encumbered by a full stomach.

At one o'clock, the bomb burst. Evacuate immediately! Patients first, nurses next, personnel last. I never saw such a quick job of loading. Within ten minutes, all our patients were on their way and the surgical teams went with them. This convoy reached Malmédy without incident. About ten minutes after they had left, it was our turn. There were ten of us (six platoon nurses besides the four of us). We all piled into one ambulance. We left everything behind except for a few toilet articles.

At half past one we approached the intersection where half an hour later the Malmédy massacre took place. The tank bat-

talion responsible for this atrocity was coming up from the south at the very time we approached from the east. If the weather had been a little clearer, we would actually have seen them. As it was, we did not see them, but we certainly heard the shelling with which they announced their arrival. This shelling began at half past one and was aimed at our convoy. Our driver drove off the road and sought protection in a wooded area. Here, we found ourselves in the company of half a dozen trucks in the same predicament. The shells were still coming in. Sister, were we scared! How could we ever get out again? When shells land so close that you can see the explosions right in front of you, you think that the enemy must know exactly where you are and you expect to be blown up with the next blast. We will never know if the Germans did see us but it doesn't make much difference. We all agreed that it would be folly to try to get back in the trucks. Our only chance was to crawl back towards Waymes. And that is what we did.

Did you ever try to make yourself inconspicuous when you are wearing dark clothes and everything else is white? Before I had gone a hundred yards, I was covered with mud and slush and melting snow and the others looked even worse. Soon we saw more American trucks coming our way and we signaled them to stop. The shelling had stopped now and it seemed safe for the oncoming vehicles to turn around. We clambered on and were back in Waymes a few minutes later. But whew! That half hour in the ditch! I think I lost ten pounds there.

In Waymes we found the hospital completely dismantled. Only a skeleton crew remained. We surveyed our situation. Obviously our retreat to the west had been cut off. Retreat to the east would take us right into Butgenbach which we knew to be in enemy hands. Retreat to the south would have taken us to St. Vith which was already

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surrounded. Retreat to the north would have been possible except that this road junction was located a mile to the east, the very direction that we most wished to avoid. We were surrounded. There was nothing to do but await capture.

Our building had been shorn of what little comfort it had offered up until this time. No stoves, no lights, no warmth. We felt as if we were already in prison. In our dismay, we retreated to the basement which seemed about the safest place. Some of us had not opened yesterday's mail and started reading it. There was a letter from Michigan for me. It started 'Dear Mabel. You lucky devil. How I wish that I were with you now.' I managed a wry smile. Then, Mary Murphy spoke up. 'Listen to this, kids.' Her letter described in extravagant detail a party that was to be held in her home town on 17 December. The letter ended: 'Hurry back here!'

Shells fell all afternoon, some within a few hundred yards. Our building was not hit in this barrage. We divided our time between the basement and the upstairs. At six o'clock, two ambulances arrived with casualties from the fight at Butgenbach. They were in severe shock and in need of immediate attention. Thankful for a chance to get busy once more and to forget our troubles, we unloaded equipment and set to work. More ambulances arrived. We did the best we could.

At two o'clock in the morning, somebody said that a German halftrack had passed our building. We had not been aware of any particular fight in the vicinity and assumed that the town had passed into enemy hands without a struggle. So we were prisoners!

All during the night, American soldiers who had been cut off came straggling in. Some were from service units and others from combat units. That posed a problem. The combat soldiers were fully armed. If

we allowed them to stay, the Germans would accuse us of violating the rules of the Geneva Convention. So we made them deposit their weapons in a distant part of the building. The commanding officer of the platoon destroyed his records. The rest of us tried to remember that lecture on the rights of prisoners of war. All I could think of was 'name, rank, and serial number.' But what if they asked all sorts of trick questions? The Germans were supposed to be darn clever at that.

The morning of 18 December was our chance to breathe. The mess sergeant managed to put up a hot breakfast, the shelling had stopped, and everybody took a new lease on life. Perhaps we would not be captured after all.

At ten, I left my ward to go into the corridor and grab a smoke. The corridor ran along a courtyard which in turn emptied on the street by means of a gate. I was looking at this gate when I saw two men approach. One was dressed in a German captain's uniform. The other wore an American uniform with a sergeant's stripes and a 5th Armored shoulder patch. They had their rifles in the ready. The one in the American uniform shouted to our truck drivers in English: 'Your hospital is under arrest. Everybody line up in the yard!' I stood thunderstruck. Was this how it felt to be captured?

Although we had plenty of weapons to overpower our would-be captors, nobody dared move for fear of violating the Red Cross rules. We marched out into the courtyard and lined up. While the German captain kept his gun pointed at us, his partner went through the lines, telling everybody to surrender personal equipment. In a short time he had a dandy collection of pocket knives, bandage scissors, and fountain pens. I'll never forget those moments. The thought that was going through my mind was: What if they capture my diary? Diaries

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were forbidden in the combat zone but most of us kept them anyway. Mine was tucked away in my bedding roll, down at the other end of the building. I was just debating whether I should even make an effort to find it when the 'sergeant' announced that the entire hospital staff (including all our patients), was to be loaded immediately. We had ten minutes to gather our belongings. That finished all chance of retrieving the diary.

Major Laird, our platoon commander, played skilfully for time. 'What of all our seriously wounded?' he said. 'It is contrary to the rules of the Geneva Convention to move them.' The SS captain delivered a long tirade which was in turn translated into English by the accomplice for the benefit of Major Laird. There followed an interchange of questions and answers, arguments and counterarguments, until finally the SS man relented. Non-transportables were to be left behind in the care of four medical officers, all the nurses, and a dozen technicians. Everybody else was to get on the trucks right away. It looked bad.

Getting several hundred men on trucks under those conditions is no small matter. It involves lots of pushing and pulling, shouting and shoving. Men broke ranks, made noise, dropped equipment. The lone SS captain could not be everywhere. In the confusion, one of our drivers slipped away. Luck was with him. Although the street was filled with excited civilians, none of them paid any attention to the scurrying American. Combat troops were nowhere to be seen but an AA unit had just pulled up down the road and our driver gave them the word. In a moment, three half-tracks started towards the school.

Throughout all this, I was startled to see that the citizens of Waynes welcomed the Germans with open arms. These were the people that we had entertained at our mess

and given our candy to! The German soldier in American uniform was evidently a nephew of the woman who ran the tavern where we had our quarters. We had given her lots of our things and she was always a model of hospitality and graciousness. But on this day, she had the crust to come out on the street, embrace her nephew, and point at us in a gesture of contempt! It was galling in the extreme.

Things now happened so fast that nobody could keep track of them. Evidently, our captors were warned about the approaching half-tracks and they started running even before we knew what was going on. Half-way across the street, they were caught in the fire from the AA men. The Germans fired back but their bullets went wild. We ducked. That was one thing we had learned well the day before. All our combat men dived for their guns and joined in the melee. It was like the hounds chasing the hare and, in this case, the hounds suffered more than the hare. Several Americans were wounded but the Germans, to the best of my knowledge, escaped. At least, we never saw them again.

At eleven, just one hour after we were captured, a lieutenant colonel of the First Division entered our courtyard, gun in hand. In stentorian tones, he announced that the situation was under control. We all came outside, ready to sing the praises of our liberators. Before we could burst out into song, machine gun fire broke out again, and not very far away either. Anxiously, we looked around. 'Don't worry,' said the colonel. 'That's my men chasing the Jerries. You are now enjoying the protection of the famous First Division!' We could have hugged him.

Major Laird decided that this was a good time to get away. He ordered all the patients loaded on the trucks. Then we got on, and after that, there was very little room

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for anything else. All our belongings stayed behind, never to be seen again. When Major Laird went back a week later, he found the place literally ripped apart from stem to stern. Our friends, the civilians, took everything that they could use and scattered the rest to the four corners. They did the most thorough job of looting I have ever seen. Even an Arab could not have improved on it.

We pulled out amid the din of battle. Where could we go? Malmédy was a ghost town. Spa was being evacuated. Liège was supposedly safe. And yet, when we arrived there that evening and found a temporary refuge at the 15th General Hospital, we heard that fifteen Americans had just lost their lives in a buzz-bomb explosion there. No place was free from the Hitler rage. We felt like hunted animals.

The 47th Field Hospital was eventually reunited at Spa a week later. Practically everybody of the first and third platoon had lost all he had. We were indeed a chastened bunch but we sang our Christmas carols with the solemn gratitude that our lives had been spared. They were spared because of the magnificent stand of our American fighting soldiers. It was to them that we owed our safety. Never shall we forget it."

The third day of the offensive, 18 December, was a day of crisis. The Germans were staking everything on a quick success. They had landed parachute troops in American uniform along the Eupen-Malmédy road and these men roamed the countryside for days, wreaking havoc wherever they went. Butgenbach was in German hands, Malmédy was under heavy pressure, Stavelot had fallen. An armored spearhead had continued beyond Stavelot to La Gleize at which point it was only five miles from Spa. Spa was important to the Germans. They sent their tanks forward under cover of the murky sky. There was very little to stop them.

### *Third Aux Headquarters at Spa*

At First Army Headquarters, General Hodges knew of the danger that threatened him but he did not know from which side the Germans would come. Everybody on the "palace guard" was pressed into service. Cooks, clerks, bakers, censors, quartermaster squads, truck drivers, ordnance crews, intelligence teams, everybody who could tote a gun was in arms. Colonel Crisler alerted his men at the villa. None of them had any idea of the proximity of the enemy. They congregated in the yard, scanned the skies, and made the usual wisecracks. Then they saw something that made them shut up.

The battle for Spa was fought on the ridge between the town and the valley of the Amblève directly to the south. The first thing the Third Auxers saw was a strafing attack of American P-47's. Those P-47's saved Spa. How they did it is a story in itself. The tanks coming towards Spa were spotted quite by accident. The air artillery liaison officer of First Army Headquarters had taken to the air in a Cub, even though the weather limited visibility to less than a mile. As he wandered around through the low overcast, he happened on the German tanks that were just coming out of the valley at Andrimont. The major reached for his intercom. "Come down here, if you want to see something." He was talking to a flight of P-47's up above. That was all the fighters needed. Down they came and they caught the German task force in the most vulnerable position, on a narrow, hollow road without avenue of escape. Never was there a more one-sided battle.

Even though Spa was saved, it was no longer a desirable Headquarters location. At five o'clock, word was passed to vacate. Harold Hansen was in charge of loading and he used his head. He ditched all the circul-lars, all the reports, all the inventories, and he took along all the blankets, all the heaters, all the radios.

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"I really ought to booby-trap this place," he commented fiendishly as he made his last check.

"Well, why don't you throw life-savers on the floor?" suggested Foregger. "The Krauts might trip over them!"

"Hell no," said Hansen. "If they can trip over them, they can eat them. But I'll blow up the generators right now." And he made off in the direction of the garage.

The Third Aux was not the only unit abandoning Spa. A regular exodus took place. The townspeople gathered in the streets to see the trucks pull out and it was obvious that they were expecting to see the Germans pull around the next corner. To be in a retreat of that sort is the most demoralizing experience a soldier can suffer. Darkness settled. The convoys stalled a hundred times. A gentle rain began to fall. Brattesani said: "Let's keep on going till we are home!" He spoke for many.

The trucks kept going only as far as Huy, a little town on the Meuse. Before long, Huy was bulging at the seams because hun-

dreds of units converged on it that night. The Aigle Noir, the only presentable hotel in town, was full of generals and colonels. With such competition, Third Auxers had to take a back-seat. All the schools, convents, and warehouses were jammed to the gills and when Colonel Francis scouted around for a place, the choice was quickly narrowed down to the opera house, the conservatory, and a *pensionnat pour jeunes filles!* For a few days, officers and men lived amid the faded glories of the opera house. Later, they set themselves up in the conservatory and cooked their meals in the shadow of two grand pianos. One place was as bad as another. Only the Aigle Noir provided warmth and comfort and this was where Third Auxers drowned their sorrows for the rest of the Bulge.

### *The Teams of Majors Partington and Lavieri*

At St. Vith on 16 December Third Auxers at the third platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital listened apprehensively to the rumblings of the battle that threatened to engulf them. Well might they be worried. St. Vith was high on the list of German objectives. The 106th Division had been torn to bits. Enemy spearheads slashed to within a few miles of the town. Nobody knew what was up. The day passed in utter gloom.

The teams here had the following compositions:

Major Philip F. Partington, Major Ronald W. Adams, Capt Paul Polski, Capt Alroy G. West, Clarence C. Whitman, Clifford C. Inman, James R. Netherland, James R. Feeney.

Major Frank J. Lavieri (Whitsitt was in Paris), Capt Michael M. Donovan, Capt. Wentworth L. Osteen, Capt George Wolf (on detached service), T-5 Matt A. Rauti-



Higginbotham, Joseph Smith, Wallfield,  
Hersh, McNeely, Prys, Shanholzer, Dixon.

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ola, T-5 Daniel Overly, T-5 Harold J. Meinz.

The nurses were Ruth Maher, Alice Short, Mary Hill, and Thelma Horgen. Ruth Maher was on pass to Luxembourg and Alice Short to Paris.

The next day Major Adams squeezed into St. Vith following a Paris leave. Still in Class A uniform, he walked into the operating room while Partington was doing a difficult chest exploration. The patient was from the 106th Division. He had suffered a bullet wound of the axilla and was obviously in grave danger from internal bleeding. The damage involved one of the major blood vessels and Partington had his hands full.

"Good thing it's on the left," observed Adams as he peered over Partington's shoulder. "If it had been on the right, it would have gotten the carotid."

"Let me have a ligature," said Partington, holding out his hand.

At this very moment there was a terrific explosion in the courtyard. Window glass was blown clear across the room. Plaster came down in great chunks. Lights went out. Captain West was knocked down. Adams was hit by a falling chair. Partington was left alone at the table, one hand on the bleeding artery, the other groping for the ligature.

A platoon officer stuck his head in the door.

"We've been hit! The major says to pull out right away. Are you fellows coming with us?"

"Are we?" said Partington with customary under-emphasis. "Why, I should hope so!"

Partington was one of the most careful surgeons in the Third Aux. It was nothing for him to spend three hours exposing a deeply imbedded foreign body or removing an irreparably damaged part of the intes-

German tank at La Gleize. This tank was part of the task force that threatened Spa on 18 December.



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tinal tract. But this time it was different. German tanks were breathing down his neck. Working by the beam of a flashlight, he completed his dissection of the subclavian artery, placed his ligature, and closed the wound.

"Now let's see if we can get out of here," he said as he put in the last suture.

By this time, most of the hospital was already on the road. All equipment was left behind. Within half an hour, the school building was deserted!

The trip from St. Vith to Vielsalm was a struggle. On the narrow road the retreating troops of the 106th Division and the advancing tanks of the 7th Armored Division clashed in the most incredible traffic snarl of the war. Trucks, jeeps, half-tracks, tanks, self-propelled guns, and carriers of all sorts stretched as far as the eye could see. At Sart-les-St.-Vith, the Third Aux truck was completely pushed off the road. In the truck just behind, Third Auxers watched an artillery sergeant of the 106th get his dander up. As one Sherman tank after another passed the spot, the sergeant jumped from his truck and leaped on the turret of a tank.

"The hell with the artillery," he shouted triumphantly. "I am going with the tanks. They know how to fight. I joined the Army to fight—not to run."



The hospital at Spa. Hurwitz and Kornfield at work. Hersh and Al Brown look on.

The tanks of the 7th Armored did know how to fight. They moved into St. Vith on 17 December and defended the town against all comers until 23 December when they retreated under orders. It was this tenacious defense, together with the same kind of resistance at other key-points along the line, that upset the whole timing of the German campaign. Time was what the Americans needed. Every day of delay was another day to bring up reinforcements.

At Vielsalm, the situation was completely out of hand. Wounded were everywhere. It was almost dark when the Third Auxers arrived. Making their rounds by flashlight, they tried to do at least a triage. As surgeons, they could not be idle while men died of shock, of peritonitis, and of a hundred preventable complications. Something had to be done.

By midnight, the Third Auxers had managed to set up an operating room of a sort. At least, there was a table, a set of sterile instruments, and a few bottles of pentothal. The first patient was brought in. Partington picked up a knife. But before he could make the incision, a sergeant rushed up with a message from the Headquarters of the Medical Group. "Cease and desist," was the essence of the text. "It is against the rules to do major surgery in a clearing station!" Third Auxers looked at each other. That was the last straw.

The next day, anxiety heightened. Stragglers descended on Vielsalm with the calamitous news: The enemy was advancing with undiminished speed. During the afternoon the clearing station received orders to evacuate and to leave all non-transportable casualties behind. Mary Hill and Thelma Horgen went on to the 107th Evacuation Hospital. The rest of the Third Auxers were designated as a holding crew at Vielsalm. A pall of gloom settled on the men.

"You see? I told you so," said Lavieri, who

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knew what it was to be expendable. "We are the bait. The Third Auxiliary Suicide Group. That's what they ought to call us."

"Nuts," said Partington.

"Nuts," echoed all the others.

Within an hour, Vielsalm was a graveyard. Not only the clearing station but most of the combat elements of the 106th Division had moved on. Shells began coming in. Partington faced a difficult decision. Should he stay in Vielsalm and see his men sacrificed or should he make a run for it while there still was a chance? Evidently he could expect no help from the outside. Third Aux Headquarters did not even know where he was. In this extremity, he decided to take matters in his own hands. He gave the order to load all casualties in the few remaining vehicles and to retreat.

They left at night. It was bitter cold and the snowy landscape of the Ardennes made it seem even colder. For the first few miles, the men traveled alone. Then, they ran into the same traffic congestion that had plagued them two days earlier. At every intersection, vehicles were lined up for miles, waiting for a chance to get through. It was during one of these jams that night raiders came over. The Third Auxers knew very well what was going on when they heard the familiar rat-tat-tat, but they were wedged so tight in their places that it was impossible to get out. They just sat, breathless and shaking, like the condemned who waits to have his head cut off by the swordsman. But no heads fell. The planes made two runs and then disappeared down the valley of the Salm. The men breathed again. "Home was never like this," said one of them. There was hollow laughter.

At midnight, the trucks arrived at La Roche where the second platoon of the 106th Clearing Station was stationed. There were no facilities for surgery. The Third Auxers

bedded their patients down and congregated in the only vacant room.

Lavieri found a candle and lit it. The flickering flame revealed a gymnasium. It had been a long hard day. The men had not been out of their clothes since they left St. Vith. Adams was still in his Class A uniform. Silently, the men spread their blankets.

Lavieri began rummaging in his musette bag. He fished out a tin can and opened it with a flourish.

"How would you all like to have a piece of nice, fresh fruit cake? Straight from Chicago! Step this way, please!"

Unbelievable as it seemed, Lavieri had salvaged his Christmas package! He was the only one who did. The Third Aux had bad luck with its Christmas presents. The 1942 shipment came to grief in North Africa and the 1944 shipment fell into the hands of the Sixth Panzer Grenadiers.

The next morning the men woke up with aching limbs and sagging spirits. They found themselves in a threadbare building that offered little more than a roof. La Roche was no better than Vielsalm or St. Vith. In fact, these three towns formed the central axis around which the Bulge was now rapidly



Lavieri probes for foreign body while Meinz, Osteen, Cooper, and Donovan look on. Picture taken at St. Vith on 16 December.

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taking shape. The Germans were pressing hard. That evening, Third Auxers went to sleep in the uneasy knowledge that they were just two jumps ahead of the enemy. When they woke up, it was only one jump.

What awakened them was a German shell that exploded in the courtyard.

"What's that?" asked Osteen, his eyes half open.

"The Krauts are sending their calling cards," said Donovan and he jumped up to inspect the damage.

"Well, that's all we need," said Partington. "Let's get out of here."

This was easier said than done. The Third Auxers were castaways. They had no transportation, no liaison, no way of communicating with Headquarters. They were strictly on their own.

"Paul, you go out and see if you can find us a truck," said Partington to his teammate, Captain Polski.

"A truck? What kind of a truck?" was Polski's surprised reply.

"Any kind, just as long as it has plenty of gasoline."

Polski was the right man for the job. He had been with a regimental medical detachment and he spoke the truck drivers' language. Within ten minutes he was back:

"Major, your truck awaits without."

"Without what?"

"Without a driver!"

"Well, what's the matter with that? You can drive, can't you?"

"Sure."

"Okay. We're off."

The Third Auxers piled in. An hour later a second shell came over and demolished a wing of the school building. Six men lost their lives.

The Third Aux truck headed for the 107th Evacuation Hospital at Libin. It

passed through Herbaimont, site of the capture of the 326th Medical Company the previous evening. Little did the Third Auxers realize what had happened here. And it was just as well because such knowledge would only have added to their discomfitures.

On 19 December General Eisenhower ordered a drastic revision of the front. Third Army abandoned its offensive in the Saar and rushed to the southern shoulder of the Bulge. First Army suspended operations towards the Roer and regrouped itself along the northern shoulder. On 20 December, this tremendous flanking movement was well under way and the Third Aux truck en route to Libin was caught in the backwash. The road was one continuous line of vehicles. After four hours of alternately creeping and standing, Polski drew up in front of a beautiful chateau. The 107th Evac was deluged with casualties and the Third Auxers were received with open arms. The nurses were here and so were the teams of Cameron and Weisel. The two freshly-arrived teams went to work. They did not stop until the next morning.

It was now 21 December, the day of the great German push towards the Meuse at Dinant. In the morning the Third Aux nurses were evacuated via Carlsbourg to



The chateau at Libin.

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Sédan. The teams of Cameron and Weisel left for Ciney. The teams of Partington and Lavieri stayed. These men had taken a beating. They needed a rest. The adjutant assigned them a suite of rooms on the top floor of the chateau and told them that they were off duty for the time being. The men were asleep in a few minutes.

Three hours later, Lavieri woke up. He does not know why he woke up, except that he sensed something wrong. He looked out over the chateau grounds. Everything was suspiciously quiet. Yesterday this spot had been a beehive; today it was a graveyard. Lavieri became alarmed. He dressed and went downstairs to investigate. The corridors were deserted, the rooms stripped down, the equipment gone. Not a soul to be seen. This was incredible. What was going on?

Quicken his steps, Lavieri came upon a big hall that had been used for administrative offices. A lone clerk was cleaning out his desk in great agitation.

"What's the matter, sergeant?" asked Lavieri. "Where's everybody?"

The sergeant looked up in surprise. "You mean you don't know that we have evacuated, Captain? This place isn't safe anymore. German tanks are supposed to be coming down the road right now. Everybody has gone to Carlsbourg. I was sent back to burn these papers!"

Suddenly the truth dawned upon Lavieri. The 107th had packed up in a hurry and the Third Auxers on the top floor had been completely forgotten. If he had not happened to wake up, they would all have slept right into captivity. There was no time to lose. He dashed back upstairs.

"Get up fellows. We got to get out of here. Quick! The Germans will be here any moment!"

The Third Auxers jumped up, dazed and befuddled. They dressed in record time and arrived in the courtyard, hoping and

praying that their truck would still be there. It was! They scrambled aboard, Polski at the wheel. The engine turned over, coughed, and died.

"Did you check the gasoline?" said Partington.

"Sure, but that was yesterday," was the answer. "Somebody might have emptied the tank."

"Hell's bells. Can't a man leave his own truck without having it molested? What is this Army coming to anyway?"

"Maybe it was the civilians," ventured Adams.

"Never mind who it was. We've got to get out of here."

On the far side of the building a car was starting up.

"What's that? German tanks?"

"Tanks, my hat. That's a jeep."

"Run and catch him!"

Adams ran around the building as fast as his legs would carry him. He arrived just in time to flag down the jeep with the clerk who had been burning the office records.

"Wait a minute, sergeant. Have you got some extra gas?"

"Yes sir. Take this can."

Adams hurried back, clutching the jerry-can. He poured the precious liquid into the tank. Polski started the engine. With a great roar the vehicle took off. As it cleared the gate, Partington reflected that now he did not own so much as a tooth brush. It was the fourth retreat.

Like a bat out of heaven, the truck tore into Carlsbourg. The town was jammed with Third Army troops. Polski drove to the marketplace. Suddenly there was a familiar voice.

"Well, I'll be damned. What are you fellows doing here? We thought that you were still at St. Vith!" It was Major Maley.

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"Well, St. Vith was a little too hot for us. We left there last Sunday." Partington made a quick calculation. Was it really only four days? It seemed more like four years!

"This is Third Army territory. You can't stay here. Go to the 130th General at Ciney. They need teams. If you leave now, you can still get there today. It's forty miles."

At Ciney, seven Third Aux teams had already gathered. The 130th General was set up in a stately mansion. Life here seemed almost civilized. Partington and his party enjoyed their first night's sleep in a real bed and considered that their troubles were over. The next day, Colonel Crisler came by. He left a truck in case of another emergency. Nobody expected such a thing but it happened.

On 24 December, the now-familiar words rang out: "The Germans are coming down the road!" This time, Third Auxers were prepared. They piled on their truck with practiced precision and they were on their way in less time than it takes to say Third Auxiliary Surgical Group. German tanks did reach Ciney but they were not the same hell-bent-for-leather tanks that had borne down on St. Vith a week earlier. The Panthers had spent themselves. Ciney marked the farthest outpost of the Bulge.

The teams from Ciney reached Huy the next day. Here they went to work at the 102nd Evacuation Hospital. At last the wild flight was over. The Bulge had passed its zenith.

### *The Teams of Majors Serbst and Sutton*

The story now returns to 16 December when the second platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital at Wiltz was coming under fire. The hospital was established in a convent. Picturesquely situated on a hill, the build-

ings overlooked not only the valley of the Wiltz but also miles upon miles of Ardennes country. Headquarters of the 28th Division was set up in the village down below.

The teams were those of Serbst and Sutton. However, there were certain providential last-minute changes. Two of Serbst's men were injured a few days before the Bulge began and were evacuated. These were Pasquale Denicola and Franklin Fisher. Sutton was on a thirty-day exchange at a Paris hospital and was replaced on 17 December by Cameron. Thus, when the fateful hour came, the Third Auxers lined up as follows:

Major Charles A. Serbst, Capt Evan Tansley, Capt Harry Fisher, Capt Eugene F. Galvin, T-4 George F. Broerman, T-4 James F. McDonald, T-5 Louis Turi.

Major Duncan A. Cameron, Capt Anthony T. Privitera, Capt Sumner W. Brown,



*The convent at Wiltz.*

## THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Capt Warren C. Hastings, T-4 Nicholas Berkich, T-5 James C. Fish, T-5 David V. Pike, Pfc Lawrence H. Janson.

The nurses team was made up of Virginia Heath, Evelyn Boesling, Mary Bignolli, and Gertrude Fuchs. On 16 December, these were joined by Ruth Maher who was on her way from Luxembourg to St. Vith.

The critical day for Wiltz came on 18 December. The right flank of the 28th Division was steadily being pushed back. In the withdrawal, a wide gap was created through which the enemy pushed a great deal of armor. Enemy thrusts encircled whole companies and destroyed them one by one. By the end of the day, the Germans had salients both north and south of Wiltz.

At the hospital, the atmosphere was tense. Communications had broken down. Major Huber, the platoon commander, tried to reach Medical Group in Bastogne. He had no luck. In spite of the hazardous conditions, Serbst decided to risk a trip to Bastogne. He traveled over a road that was already coming under fire and he found out very little. Medical Group was just as confused as the people at Wiltz. A distraught adjutant told Serbst to return to Wiltz and stand by for further orders. Serbst knew that he was in for trouble because there was no way of getting orders to Wiltz except by special courier. However, he was given no choice. He returned to Wiltz, filled with misgivings.

In the evening Division Headquarters sent word that Wiltz was surrounded. A convoy was being made up to take out the remnants of the garrison. Nine trucks would be available for the hospital. "Be ready at nine o'clock," the message read.

Huber and Serbst discussed their problem. What to do with the non-transportable casualties? Huber wanted to abide by Army regulations which said that such casualties should not travel. Serbst argued that

a truck ride could not possibly hurt these men as much as the treatment they would receive at the hands of the Germans. Serbst was right but Huber prevailed.

The hospital was divided into two sections: those to go and those to stay. There were 26 non-transportables. Cameron and Serbst flipped a coin. Cameron won, Serbst lost. Besides Serbst's team, Major Huber and one other medical officer would remain at Wiltz to face the music.

The trucks took off a little after nine. They carried all the transportable patients, most of the platoon personnel, the Third Aux nurses, and Cameron's men. On the outskirts of Wiltz other trucks joined the procession. Two half-tracks led the way.

The retreating troops of the 28th Division had thrown up a road block between Wiltz and Bastogne. When the half-tracks approached this road block they were greeted by fire from 28th Division troops. The misunderstanding was soon cleared up. The head of the column started through, including the hospital group. In the darkness, progress was slow and many trucks were still waiting when a German shell landed in their midst. The wreckage made the road impassable. Several trucks started burning. The occupants were forced to continue their journey on foot. Some of them were able to make their way to Bastogne but the majority became lost in the woods. They wandered around for days in the snow, suffering untold hardships. Serbst saw many of them, starved and frozen, after they had been captured. They were a pitiful sight.

The trucks that squeezed through the road block found Bastogne already in the throes of siege. By midnight, the Germans were only three miles away and there was only one combat command of the 10th Armored Division to stop them. The Third Auxers reported to VIII Corps. "Set up a hospital in the monastery," was the order. The mon-

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astery had been stripped of everything except some tables and chairs. The Third Auxers decided that they could do no good here. At two o'clock in the morning they pulled out. The team of Cameron went to the 107th Evacuation Hospital at Libin and the nurses to the 42nd Field Hospital at Sédan.

For those who stayed behind at Wiltz, the prospects were grim. During the night the Germans shelled the bridge across the Wiltz and the concussions blew out all the windows. Huber and Serbst moved their patients to the basement. It was an anxious and haggard group of men that worked through the long hours of darkness, fearful of what the morning would bring.

At seven o'clock the men ate a cold breakfast. At eight they heard machine gun fire in the village. The sounds of battle crept closer and closer. Huber seized a bed sheet, fashioned it into a white flag, and went outside. He could see German paratroopers on the road and tried to attract their attention. At first, the Germans kept on firing but Huber escaped the bullets. Finally the Ger-

mans saw that they were dealing with a hospital. They approached Huber and told him to line up his men in the courtyard.

Worn out from their vigil and glad that the uncertainty was over, the Third Auxers emerged. The first thing the paratroopers did was to search their prisoners. They seemed to be interested mainly in cigarettes. When they came to Harry Fisher, they stopped. "Jude!" Fisher cringed. He was taken out of the line and marched off. The intent was clear. It was a moment of agony for the rest of the men.

"The bastards," muttered Serbst. "They are going to shoot him!"

A German captain addressed himself to the small group of Americans that remained in the courtyard.

"You are prisoners of the Fifth Panzer Army. We will establish a Hauptverbandplatz in this building. You will remain here to take care of your own wounded."

Back in the basement the Third Auxers tried to look cheerful in front of their patients but they did a poor job of it. Fisher was going to be executed! It couldn't be worse. The curtain was ringing down on Team No. 11.

The Hauptverbandplatz moved in shortly. It was the German version of a clearing station and consisted of five officers and fifty enlisted men. The officers tried to be friendly but did not hesitate to expropriate all the hospital supplies. And no wonder. Their own equipment consisted of paper bandages, crude instruments and make-shift sterilizers. The only instrument that was new and shiny was the amputation knife. The German surgeons wielded it with uncanny dispatch. They would take off an arm or a leg as readily as the Americans would incise a boil. When Serbst registered his amazement, they said: "We do not have the time or the money to undertake tedious and expensive reparative surgery. A man with a stump can be



Team No. 11. Galvin, Fisher, Tansley, Serbst.  
The enlisted men are not shown.

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discharged in a few weeks. A man with a plaster cast uses up a hospital bed for months."

During the next few days scores of American casualties were brought to Wiltz. Many of them died for lack of blood. Conditions grew steadily worse. There was no heat. Supplies were giving out. The news from the front was disheartening. Shells landed sporadically. The Third Auxers worked in a spirit of utter dejection.

On Christmas Eve, the German officers sent several bottles of wine to the basement. Serbst ordered the wine passed around to the casualties but before this could be done, four shells landed in rapid succession in the courtyard. Four Americans were injured by falling beams and flying glass. The Germans suffered even worse. It was a sad Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Day Germans and Americans had a joint dinner. The Corps surgeon dropped in. He was a jolly sort of fellow and promised the Americans a quick return to their own troops. As the day wore on, it was obvious that the Germans were getting worried. Third Army tanks were beginning to bite into the southern shoulder of the Bulge. American planes came over and plastered Wiltz. The building shook to its very foundations.

On 27 December, the Germans decided to evacuate. They loaded all their own patients first, starting early in the morning. At noon it was the Americans' turn. Officers and men were separated. There were over eighty casualties, at least half of them non-transportable. Serbst could hardly conceal his bitterness when the wounded had to be placed on open trucks for the long journey. And a long journey it was. The retreat was now general. Roads were jammed. It took all day to get to Bitburg, just beyond the Siegfried Line. At this point, the convoy split up. The wounded were moved to the

hospitals on the Rhine. The hospital personnel were detained in Bitburg.

Bitburg had no facilities for prisoners of war. In fact, it had no facilities for anything. The driver was completely at a loss. Finally, after driving around through the blackout for the better part of an hour, he dumped his load at the city jail, a ramshackle structure that had only two cells. The jailer was overwhelmed with this sudden influx. He did his best. Nuns brought soup. It was thin stuff but it was warm. Third Auxers ate like hungry dogs. Then they unrolled their blankets and bedded down on the concrete floor. They were dead tired.

They remained in the Bitburg jail for two days. The nuns ran out of soup and the jailer was busy with other chores. The prisoners took another hitch in their belts.

"I always thought that the *oubliette* went out with the Inquisition," said Tansley. "Guess I was wrong."

The next morning, 30 December, the journey was resumed. The Third Auxers including some of the hospital personnel were marched to a railroad siding. A train was waiting. It was a welcome sight to the men who had been dragging their blankets and bedding rolls over the wet and muddy road. The train took off. It chugged for hours along the winding valley of the Moselle. At Winningen it came to a halt. Third Auxers heard that the bridge was blown and that they would be marched into Coblenz the following day.

Again the prisoners were led to the town jail. Again they spread their blankets on a concrete floor. Again they tried to kill the hunger pains by hitching up their belts. The day had gone by without any food.

That evening it started to snow. It snowed all night and part of the next morning. Then the weather cleared and the men lined up for the march.

"I wonder how far it is," said Serbst,

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eyeing his sleeping bag, his blankets, his musette bag, and his duffel bag with misgiving.

"Too far," said Galvin. "We'll never make it."

The bridge at Winningen had been bombed. A ferryman had strung a cable across the river and took the Third Auxers across. They began the march, weak with hunger and numb with cold.

"Look at those planes coming down this way," said Serbst. "I bet they are after the bridge."

Serbst was right. It was a flight of American bombers. The men dropped their burdens and crouched low. Concussions rocked the countryside. Water spouts dotted the river. Mud and debris flew sky-high. What was left of the bridge disintegrated. The men picked themselves up. They were covered with slush from head to foot. It was several minutes before they regained their composure.

The German guards decided that the main road was too dangerous. They switched to a trail. This trail led into the hills, rising precipitously to an altitude of eight hundred feet. It was partly frozen, partly rock-strewn. Footing was precarious. The paraboots caused painful blisters. The baggage, an awkward burden at best, now became a threat to progress. One misstep could spell disaster. Gradually the precious articles went down the steep ravine. First the sleeping bags. Next the blankets. Finally the duffel bags. At the top, only musette bags remained.

From Winningen to Coblenz by main road is barely ten miles but across the hills the distance grew to twice that much. And the German guards did not tarry. They knew that American planes would come over again and they wanted to be in a Coblenz air-raid shelter when that happened. On and on they went, every step a strain,

every hill a hazard, every mile a misadventure. Even the sky turned hostile. Fresh snow began to fall. White with fatigue, Galvin turned to his fellows. "I don't know if I'll ever get to Coblenz," he said. "Maybe Harry Fisher's way out was the easiest."

At this moment, the Third Auxers were already in the foothills overlooking the Rhine valley. Soon, they could see the city itself. Coblenz was in a strategic location. Situated at the confluence of the Moselle and the Rhine, it had for years been the traditional home of the "Wacht am Rhein." A previous generation of Germans had erected a huge statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I where the two rivers come together and this spot had been proudly called the "Deutsche Ecke." But there was nothing proud about it when the Third Auxers appeared on the scene. Kaiser Wilhelm was hanging head-down in a most ignominious position and his horse had erupted all sorts of hardware through a gaping hole in its side. The scene seemed to be symbolic of the fate threatening all Germany in the winter of 1945.

The streets of Coblenz were deserted. It was a ghost city. Suddenly the air-raid alarm sounded and the streets became filled with scurrying civilians on their way to the shelters. The Americans were swept along in the maelstrom. Once inside, they sank to the floor. They were exhausted.

The Coblenz shelters were unique. They had been dug into the side of the hills facing the Rhine and they were indestructible. At the moment the Third Auxers entered they were jammed. Thousands of Germans milled about. Soon these people began to realize that Americans were in their midst and they gave vent to their feelings in no uncertain terms. "Heraus mit den verdammten Amerikaner!" The Third Auxers could not understand the words but the accompanying gestures were unmistakable. Many an American bomber crew had been brutally mur-

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dered under such circumstances. Even the guards assumed a threatening attitude. It was a moment fraught with peril.

The Third Auxers picked themselves up and retreated. They had no desire to stay in these sinister surroundings. One by one they slipped out, their ears still ringing with deprecations. Bombs were falling. Serbst led his men to a tar-paper shack.

"May I sweat this one out with you?" quipped Tansley.

"You are welcome," was the reply.

The raid continued for half an hour and destroyed the last remaining bridge over the Rhine. It was getting dark. The guards had instructions to take their prisoners across the river. They pressed a rowboat into service. It was a treacherous crossing, made more so by the blackout. On the far side, hills loomed again. The guards started for Ehrenbreitstein. It was a steep road. Higher and higher it went. Galvin was near collapse. Tansley's feet were frozen. Serbst was staggering. Only superhuman efforts kept these men going.

The ancient walls of Ehrenbreitstein had seen Americans before. In 1918 occupation troops had swarmed over these same ramparts and the Germans were a friendly people. But in 1944 this had changed. The atmosphere was charged with resentment and when another air-raid sounded, the Germans went to their shelters and the Americans stayed outside.

"It's New Year's Eve, boy. These are the best fireworks I have seen since I left the States," said Galvin.

The march continued into the night. It did not end until the guards themselves were overcome with fatigue. Then, they locked their prisoners in a bunker. Here, the eleven Americans were crowded together in a space of twenty foot square. The slit-like windows allowed the frigid air to blow back and forth and the men would have frozen, had they

not huddled close together. Such was New Year's Eve for Team No. 11.

The next day was one of the coldest of the entire winter. The skies were clear and the sun shed its light over a landscape scintillating in its whiteness. The hills of the Taunus were covered with a blanket of snow. The road stood out in sharp relief, stretching away to the east as far as the eye could see. "I wonder where these Krauts are taking us," mused Tansley. "To Limburg," said Huber who had been talking to one of the guards. Limburg was thirty miles. Thirty miles of painful progress in freezing weather through snowbound country. It was a grim prospect.

The march started early in the morning. Presently, the Third Auxers heard the rumble of a truck. The vehicle approached at breakneck speed. And, as luck would have it, there was an empty trailer behind the truck. The guard held up his hand. The truck stopped. The men climbed on the trailer.

The truck driver seemed to be in a great hurry. He paid no heed to the slippery road, the many curves, the steep declivities. Faster and faster he went. The men in the trailer held on for dear life. Their vehicle bounced from one side of the road to the other, traveling on two wheels more than on four. Crazily, it scraped trees, poles, fences. Desperately, the Third Auxers hung on. "We've had it, boys," gasped Tansley.

The truck headed down towards the bottom of a small valley. Going more than fifty miles an hour, the trailer did not have a chance. It skidded sideways, sideswiped a cement abutment, broke loose from the truck, and landed upside down in the ditch. In this accident that could easily have killed every occupant, only one man was seriously injured and that was the German guard! He smashed his leg. The others landed in

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soft snow and came off with nothing worse than cuts and bruises.

The truck driver summoned aid. The Third Auxers fashioned a crude splint for the casualty and carried him to a nearby farmhouse. Then they continued on their journey. Footsore as they were, they still preferred walking to riding. That night they reached Montebaur. The guards moved their prisoners into a youth hostel. The house mother took pity on the starved Americans and gave them their first hot meal in three days. The meal was a watered-down version of mulligan stew but it tasted like the juiciest steak. The Third Auxers relaxed. This was more comfort than they had had since they left Wiltz.

On the next day, 2 January, the Americans reached Limburg, site of the notorious Stalag XII A. Misery, want, and disease stalked the prison population. The men slept in barracks of about the same size as U. S. Army barracks, with this difference that, while an American barracks houses twenty men the German barracks housed four hundred! Bunks were stacked in tiers. Nobody ever took his clothes off and nobody ever took a bath. Sanitary facilities consisted of one wash basin and one latrine for four hundred men. Rations were shaved down to a bowl of soup a day. Besides this, each group of six men received a loaf of bread. The loaves were all the same size. And yet, the man who brought back a loaf that was only a fraction of an inch undersize was castigated as if he had committed a major crime. The wooden soup bowls were never washed. Dysentery, typhus, and tuberculosis were rampant.

Shortly after their arrival, the Third Auxers were separated. Tansley went to work in the camp hospital. This hospital was a disgrace. When Tansley arrived, there were almost three hundred American casualties, mostly from the Battle of the Bulge but also from the frequent air-raids. With

two other medical officers, Tansley had to look after the ills and wounds of men who had been neglected for months. Every wound was infected, every illness complicated. On the first day, Tansley changed the bandages so enthusiastically that he used up a week's supply. Then he made a rule: only when the pus was dripping through the bandages did the wound get dressed. Ambrose Paré did better in the 15th century!

On 13 January, Serbst and Galvin were sitting disconsolately on their bunks when there was a commotion outside.

"Looks like another bunch of Krieges," said Serbst, munching a piece of stale bread. His chief interest was now centered on food.

"Maybe there is somebody we know in there," said Galvin and he looked inquiringly at the handful of pitiful prisoners who had lined up outside.

"I think they're coming in here. You indoctrinate them, Gene."

"You mean I have to show them how to cut a loaf of bread into six pieces? Hell . . . they'll learn that quickly enough."

The new prisoners were coming in. Serbst lifted a weary eye. The usual motley crew. Hungry men. Ragged men. Dejected men. Then, Serbst saw something that made his eyes pop. A big smile parted his lips. He jumped to his feet.

"Harry Fisher! Why . . . we thought that the Germans had shot you!"

"Hell no! I fought the battle of Bастogne!"

"Well, give us the dope."

"You remember how the Krauts picked me out of the line at Wiltz? They took me to the motor pool and asked me if I knew how to drive an ambulance. I said that I was a medical officer but the Feldwebel made a threatening gesture and I knew damn well that old Harry didn't have a chance. We

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started for the front right away. I had one German orderly with me. When we got to the bottom of the hill, we hitched up with a Verbandplatz detachment of the Panzer Lehr Division. It was a regular convoy. I turned the heater up and was just beginning to enjoy myself when bang! a shell hit directly in front of me. Blew out my radiator. The truck ahead of me was demolished. Dead Krauts everywhere. It didn't stop them, though. We switched to a German ambulance and away we went.

We drove several more miles till we got to Bras, not very far from Bastogne. There was a heavy battle going on at Wardin. The Krauts decided that they wanted a first-aid station at Bras. That was about noon. We picked the only undamaged house in the place and set up. All we had was two German medical officers and a handful of enlisted men."

Fisher had been pitched into one of the greatest battles of the war. It was a battle between hastily gathered American troops and a whole German Panzer Army. The defenders of Bastogne were made up of the 101st Airborne, one combat command of the 10th Armored, and the 705th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The 10th Armored got there first. Its combat command arrived at four o'clock in the afternoon of 18 December. The first units of the 101st arrived at midnight of 18 December. The tank destroyers arrived on the evening of 19 December.

The first skirmish took place on the evening of 18 December at Longvilly, six miles to the east. Here, the 10th Armored fought off an overwhelming force of German armor for several hours before withdrawing to Neffe. On the morning of 19 December, when Fisher became a willy-nilly member of Panzer Lehr, the Germans launched an all-out attack on Wardin, just off the Bastogne-Wiltz road. They wiped out Company I of the 101st Parachute Infantry and

created a gap that was not plugged until the next day. It was this engagement that provided many anxious hours for Fisher in his first-aid post at Bras.

"It was rugged. Bras is located on high ground and Wardin on low ground. Whenever the fog lifted, we could see German tanks engaging American infantry. The Germans had seven Tiger tanks and a whole battalion of armored infantry. The Americans had just one company of infantry and no anti-tank weapons at all. The German tanks moved up, each one with a platoon of infantry in support. It was murder. I don't see how our boys took it as long as they did. The Krauts shot up every house in the village and every basement too. By nightfall, there wasn't a wall standing. Then, the wounded started coming in.

The first one was a paratrooper who had been shot in the abdomen. He told me that the attack had come as a complete surprise. The German armor was upon them before they could even ask for artillery support. Fog swirled in and out. Long-range firing was out of the question. The first thing this fellow saw was a Tiger tank and a bunch of Krauts, and all he had was a machine gun! He could have held his fire and retreated to the basement. Not him. He blazed away with all he had. He wiped the Krauts out in about thirty seconds. Then the Tiger swung around and let him have it. Can you imagine getting hit with an 88 at fifty yards? That fellow had what it takes. He lived twelve hours.

Company I was practically destroyed. There were over a hundred casualties that I saw myself. There were many more that I never saw at all. I'll never forget that night. I was trying to take care of a hundred casualties in one of those two-by-four Belgian basements. Most of the casualties had to stay outside in the rain. American shells started coming at us and we decided

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to get out as quickly as we could. We left most of the casualties behind.

The next day, 20 December, we moved to Wardin. This was a couple of miles closer to Bastogne. I could see the town plainly and it looked like open country to me. But, instead of moving along the main road, the Krauts advanced on Marvie. From Marvie to Bastogne is only a little over a mile. I guess they figured that they had us if they could take Marvie.

We arrived towards noon and set up in the usual location: a bombed-out basement. That's all that was left of Wardin. Just basements. I could see four Tiger tanks and six half-tracks closing in on Marvie. The answering fire didn't seem to hurt them in the least. Later I heard that we only had a couple of light tanks there. They tried to get out but were shot up in the process.

Then, something happened. The Tigers were beginning to get into trouble. Two of them were hit in a matter of seconds. The

fire came from the north. The third tank made a dash for the village and ran smack into a bazooka man who finished it in short order. The fourth one turned chicken and ran off. Meanwhile the half-tracks had reached Marvie and deposited the infantry. They slugged it out with our boys for a full two hours. The half-tracks cruised up and down but the fighting was done indoors. You could only guess at it.

Later in the afternoon, the Germans put smoke on Marvie. After that, nobody knew who was where. Night closed in. That was when the snow began. A wounded man didn't have a chance. They either bled to death or froze to death. I saw one man who had been firing a machine gun at the Germans. A Kraut crawled up and heaved a grenade at him. You know what those German grenades do. Well, this fellow lay next to his machine gun all night, literally splattered with lead. Then the Germans brought him in. I counted over a hundred separate

That was when the snow began.



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wounds. The poor fellow was so cold, he couldn't move a muscle. He couldn't even talk. All he could do was nod his head. He died in a couple of hours. What a miserable way to die."

To Fisher, the battle for Marvie seemed a debacle but to the Germans it was a major setback. Marvie remained in American hands, even though German half-tracks ranged the streets. The Germans could not enter Bastogne and kept on pushing around it. On 20 December they cut the road to Neufchateau and completed the encirclement of Bastogne. On 21 December, there were several engagements west of the town but these lacked the strength and persistence of the previous two days. On 22 December, the Germans delivered their ultimatum. "Nuts," said General McAuliffe.

On 23 December, a fleet of C-47's dropped supplies and reinforcements to the defenders. The drop-zone was just west of the town. Fisher in his post at Wardin could see the whole spectacle.

"All through the day, we could see the flights. It was the most thrilling thing I have ever seen. Late in the afternoon, gunfire started up again. The poor fellows at Marvie were taking it on the chin. The Krauts had put snowsuits on and they sneaked up on Marvie behind their tanks. At one point, they flushed an American half-track out of the woods just south of Marvie. I saw the driver hightailing it for the village. The Americans in Marvie thought he was German and let him have it. That was the end of him. His vehicle blocked the road all the rest of the night and kept the German

C-47's drop supplies to the defenders of Bastogne.



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tanks away. The next thing I saw was an old-fashioned whoop-and-holler attack by the Germans. I could hear them yell. Their flares lighted the entire area. A hayloft was hit and started to burn. The bright light of the flames against the background of snow was fantastic. It beat any show I ever saw. But I was too damned cold to be impressed.

That fire killed the German chances. It showed them up as plain as the nose on your face and the Americans picked them off one by one. At eight o'clock, two American tanks moved into Marvie from the north. They raised plenty of hell. Gradually, the fire died down. Then, they started bringing us casualties. One of them was a Lieutenant Morrison who had been shot in the chest. He told me that Marvie was being defended by the 327th Glider Infantry and that they were giving the Heinies a hell of a time. I did what I could for Morrison and evacuated him. We sent all our wounded as quickly as possible to the Hauptverbandplatz at Wiltz. I don't know what became of Morrison."

"I remember him," said Serbt. "He got along all right."

The night attack of 23 December carried the Germans past Marvie. Two of their tanks actually entered Bastogne. They were quickly knocked out however and the Germans were never again able to exploit their advantage. All through the siege, they made the same mistake of putting pressure on a limited front only. By the time they had created a break-through, the 101st was waiting for them with reinforcements.

"The next day, 24 December, six P-47's came over and bombed the hell out of Marvie," Fisher continued. "They also attacked our positions at Wardin. Brother, I never want any part of that again. Fortunately, the 4th Armored was coming up from the south by now. The 4th Armored had licked the Krauts at Avranches and the Krauts

knew it. But the worst thing for the Krauts was the artillery fire from Bastogne. They never knew where they would be hit next. On Christmas Day we pulled out and moved to Oberwampach. No blood, no plasma, no instruments, no decent bandages. And a steady stream of casualties. It was killing. I never worked so hard in my life.

Oberwampach was a one-day stand. The Krauts folded just as quickly as they had rushed in. Our next stop was Hoscheid. That was a big jump to the rear and we knew darn well that the Germans were getting kicked in the teeth. At Hoscheid we set up in the village inn. The conditions were dreadful but I was so tired that it made little difference to me. I hadn't slept for days. The hardest thing was seeing our boys die without being able to do more than pat them on the back.

On Christmas Day, the Americans drew a bead on us. Shells came in from all directions. The first ones landed just outside the village. Then they got the range and the whole place began to disintegrate. One shell blew in the front door. That was enough for the Krauts. They got out of there in a hurry. All the time I kept hoping that we would get some protection from our Red Cross but the signs were so small that nobody could see them. We got out of Hoscheid late that night. Christmas night.

We traveled all night and covered five miles. Then we set up in a church near Vianden. This was the day the 4th Armored got through to Bastogne. <sup>26 Dec 44</sup> I heard about it from our own boys but the Germans wouldn't admit it. I never saw such overbearing fatheads.

On 1 January, Patton's tanks were catching up with us again. We got out of Vianden and moved to Bitburg. Here we set up in a school and I saw at least a hundred American casualties. Wasn't able to do much for them though. The next day, a flight of

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B-26's came over. Six bombs landed near our hospital. When we picked ourselves up, we counted eight dead and twenty-five wounded. There was a kid from the 101st Airborne with a cast on his leg. He was blown forty feet and did not have a scratch! Bitburg became uninhabitable overnight. We packed up and moved to Kochem on the Moselle. There we got on a train and went to Winningen."

"Winningen?" interrupted Serbst. "I know that place. Perish the memory."

"They put me to work in a hospital there. Even gave me some soup. But how can you work in a place that is bombed every day? They put me on a truck and shipped me here. Now what has gone on with you?"

"We have had a rugged time, thank you." And Serbst told Fisher the whole dreary business, ending with "And as far as this camp is concerned, it is worse than the Black Hole of Calcutta. Look around. Did you ever see a bunch of sad sacks like this?"

Fisher had to admit that Limburg was disgraceful. In a way, he was lucky because he was the last member of the team to arrive there and the first to leave. On 20 January he was marched with hundreds of others to a railroad siding. The train was made up of box cars and each car was divided into three compartments with chicken wire. During the First War, Americans had marveled at the French who packed forty soldiers and eight horses into their box cars. But the Germans went them one better. They jammed seventy-five prisoners into each car, slammed the door shut, and drew a bolt across. There was no room to sit. The air was foul. The close confinement was maddening. A prisoner in Fisher's compartment went berserk and had to be restrained. Everybody was desperate.

Suddenly, the air-raid sirens sounded an alarm. The German guards ran without bothering to unlock the doors. A standing

train is a juicy target for any bomber. The men knew the fate that awaited them. Explosions started in various parts of the yard. Fisher was sure that his end had come.

At the last moment, somebody unbolted the door. Frantically, the men squeezed through. Fisher jumped and started running. He did not look where he was going. He just ran. A gigantic crater loomed ahead of him. He lost his footing and rolled towards the bottom of the pit. A terrific explosion rent the air and a piece of sheet metal was blown across the crater in such a way as to form a perfect roof for it! Fisher was stunned. He examined himself. Not a scratch! Third Aux luck held out.

In that holocaust forty men were killed and many more were injured. Fisher worked over his comrades till he dropped in his tracks. Eventually, ambulances and trucks arrived and the wounded were taken to the camp hospital. Here, Tansley and Fisher joined efforts, crushed by the thought that American bombs were killing American soldiers.

During the night the Germans brought up fresh cars and in the morning the loading started over again. Fisher seethed when the guards again bolted the doors but there was nothing he could do. This time, there were no bombs. Just endless hours of harrowing confinement in the locked cars. The hours grew to days and the prisoners lived on bread and water. The only sanitary facility was a one-gallon bucket which added its effusions to the general pollution. Bitter cold, starvation rations, cramped positions, gnawing fear, noisome air, these were the mental and physical hazards besetting the prisoners on their journey. When it was time to detrain, many men were too weak to walk.

At Hammelburg Fisher was joined by Serbst and Galvin. Sensenbach came later. On 13 March still another Third Auxer showed up: Dworkin.

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Thus, the Hammelburg camp became a gathering point. Even as liberation was just around the corner, two more Third Auxers appeared on the scene. These were George Broerman and Louis Turi. They had been separated from the officers, stripped of their possessions, and marched to Hammelburg. Broerman almost died of pneumonia on this march.

The abortive liberation of Hammelburg by Task Force Baum is a saga of the 4th Armored Division. On 26 March, this division was camped south of Frankfurt. Hammelburg was sixty miles away. General Patton thought that a small task force could beat a path across this territory, seize the camp, and bring the prisoners back. Although he never admitted it, he was probably moved by his desire to free his son-in-law, Lieutenant Colonel Waters, who had been captured in Tunisia two years earlier. The order was issued on 26 March.

Captain Baum was in charge. His force

was long on speed but short on strength. It consisted of 10 medium tanks, 6 light tanks, 3 assault guns (105 mm), 27 half-tracks, and 6 jeeps, a total of 42 vehicles and 293 men. They jumped off from Schweinheim at half past one in the morning of 27 March. The town had been softened up by a preparatory artillery barrage, but not enough to allow clear passage. There was a fierce fight in the streets of the town and one of Baum's medium tanks came to grief. It was but a taste of things to come.

Baum piloted his party with skill. Light tanks ahead, mediums in the center, half-tracks in the rear. The route lay along the line Aschaffenburg-Lohr-Gemunden. At first the Germans were puzzled. In the darkness they could do little more than level an occasional rifle shot at the marauders. Gradually however they began to realize that they were dealing not with the redoubtable 4th Armored but with a task force of modest proportions. Here and there, anti-tank units

An American tank crashes the gate at Hammelburg. Men in the background are Serbs.



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began to harass the Americans. Baum pushed on.

At Gemunden the bridge was out. The tanks turned north, picking up a German general on the way. At Burgsinn they found a bridge and crossed. On the far side, German tanks laid down interdictory fire. The task force began to suffer losses in materiel as well as in personnel. The only hope lay in speed. Baum called his men together. "Hammelburg is fifteen miles away," he said. "Drive like hell. Keep maneuvering. Use natural cover. Keep them guessing."

The Germans had prepared an ambush at Pfaffenhausen. A sharp fight ensued and Baum lost many of his half-tracks as well as several light tanks. The only way to get to Hammelburg was to strike out cross-country. Charging through woods and pastures, the force out-smarted the Germans and caught sight of its objective at half past four in the afternoon. Hammelburg was guarded by a battalion of German infantry. Baum's job was to subdue the garrison, liberate the prisoners, and beat a retreat before the Germans could bring up their tanks. The odds were against him.

The medium tanks and assault guns laid a covering fire; the light tanks and half-tracks with following infantry advanced on the camp. German counter-fire knocked out five of the half-tracks but the 105's over-powered the opposition and when the tanks arrived at the camp gates, they found the Germans on the run.

Third Auxers had their first inkling of what was going on when the shelling started. Most of the shells landed in the Serbian sector of the camp. One of the Serbs made his way to the American sector to explain that the Serbs had suffered casualties and to find out if the Americans could establish contact with the attackers. Colonel Waters volunteered. He improvised a white flag from a bed sheet and started for the

main gate. A German guard shot him in cold blood and Colonel Waters collapsed with a serious wound of the groin. He was carried back to the barracks.

A short time later, American tanks poked their noses through the gate. Pandemonium broke loose. The prisoners poured out, surrounded the tanks, shouted their joy, and shook hands with their liberators. It was a moment of unbounded enthusiasm. Then came the disillusionment. The prisoners learned that this was only a small task force. Fifteen hundred of them had to ride on the few available vehicles! Baum was appalled at the prospect. It was manifestly impossible to accommodate everybody.

Serbst and a few others found room in the jeeps and half-tracks. Some climbed on the tank turrets. But the vast majority had to walk. Everybody grabbed his belongings and streamed for the exits. Within fifteen minutes, the entire prison population had vanished in the rapidly gathering darkness. It was the quickest mass-evacuation of the war.

That evening, German radio announcers talked gleefully of the tremendous losses suffered by the Americans in the tank attack on Hammelburg. The announcers were right. Baum's force had been cut to half its original size, even before it entered Hammelburg. Soon, it was to be dissipated altogether. The Germans concentrated an entire armored division outside the camp gates. The jig was up.

Baum decided to make his break in a northerly direction. He sent one of his light tanks as an advance patrol. This was followed by a half-track and then by a jeep carrying Colonel Goode and Serbst. Goode was the senior American officer in the camp. There was a distance of several hundred yards between the scout-tank and the jeep. Almost immediately, the tank was hit by a Panzer Faust. The explosion killed many

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of the prisoners on the tank turret and the entire column was thrown into confusion. Small-arms fire raked the road. Serbst went forward to see what he could do. When he came to the tank, he found dead and dying everywhere. One man was bleeding severely from a deep wound of the arm. Serbst took the man's belt and made an emergency tourniquet. Then he turned to the others. He had his hands full.

Meanwhile, Baum made an about-face with his remaining vehicles. In the resulting withdrawal, Serbst lost all contact with Task Force Baum. In fact, he suddenly was entirely by himself. As he was debating what to do, two other Americans stumbled across his path. They were Major Saunders of the 9th Armored and Major Fischer of the 106th. The three men made an estimate of the situation. Obviously, their escape lay to the west. But where was west? Serbst looked up. Quickly, he oriented himself. Task Force Serbst set out. The star class at Fort Sam was paying off.

In the early morning, the three men came upon the remainder of Baum's tanks. They had drawn up in a woods, hoping to evade the withering fire of the German anti-tank weapons. Of the original 293 men in the task force, less than a hundred were left. Baum could see that he did not have a chance. His mission now was to save as many of his men as possible. With a fine eye for the drama of the moment, he addressed his decimated contingent: "Officers, non-coms, and men! We have come to the end of the road. Every man is on his own. As nearly as I can tell you, our lines are still at Aschaffenburg. Disable your tanks and try to find your way back. Good luck. The 4th Armored is proud of you."

Thus came the end for Task Force Baum. The men scattered and were rounded up later in the day by the heavily-armed German search parties. Baum himself was wounded. Of the entire task force and

prison population, only a handful made good their escape. Serbst was among them. The rest were apprehended and taken back to Hammelburg. Serbst's break for freedom is a saga of its own.

For thirty-six hours, the three men hid in the woods. There were too many Germans to risk a getaway. Moreover, the searchers were jittery and shot at everything that looked only faintly suspicious. After the firing subsided somewhat, the Americans struck out. They marched at night and hid during the day. They avoided the roads and fled to the woods at the slightest sign of trouble.

The nights were the worst. The weather was miserably cold and the men had only their tattered combat jackets and threadbare trousers. Often, they would have to make long detours to stay away from farms and villages. They forded several small streams and stole a rowboat to cross the river Sinn. They went without food for three days. On the fourth day they became so hungry that they devoured a stack of raw potatoes. The next day, they did the same thing with a stack of raw beets and became violently ill as a result. And all the time, Serbst was navigating by the stars.

On 4 April, after they had marched for eight days, the men were so desperate that they decided to enter a village. It was broad daylight but nobody paid any attention to the three beggars. "What is this, anyway?" complained Serbst. "Do we look that bad?" Finally, a farmer approached the trio.

"Amerikaner?"

"Ja, ja."

"Hammelburg?"

"Ja, ja."

"Kommen Sie herein."

The farmer called to his wife and led the Americans into the parlor. Presently, the wife brought hot soup, fried potatoes, and liverwurst. It tasted like manna to the

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starved men. The farmer offered them a place in his barn, provided they would keep under cover. "We still have plenty of SS men around here," he warned. The footsore men stretched out for their first real rest in a week.

On 6 April an American patrol approached: two jeeps and a half-track. Serbst could hardly contain himself. He ran to the middle of the road, waved his arms like mad, and shouted at the top of his voice. Within a minute, he was talking to a captain of the 14th Armored Division. The three men jumped on the jeep and raced back to the Division Command Post at Gemunden. From there they were taken to the 27th Evacuation Hospital in Aschaffenburg where they had their first bath in months.

When Serbst looked at himself in a mirror, he could hardly believe his eyes. Who was this gaunt looking man? Hollow eyes, scraggly beard, scrawny neck, flabby arms, sagging stomach! It wasn't even a reasonable facsimile. Serbst smiled wanly. "Look here, fellow," he said to his image. "There isn't a thing wrong with you that a little good food won't fix up." He was right. When he arrived in New York a few weeks later he was already well on the road to recovery.

Serbst is a Third Aux legend. He was the premier front line surgeon. Wherever his comrades gather, they drink a toast to the man who blazed a trail on Omaha, stood by his guns at Wiltz, and defied the Germans at Hammelburg.

Of the Third Auxers who were recaptured at Hammelburg, only Galvin stayed until the final liberation on 6 April. He was flown to Bad Orb on the same day and arrived home before any of the others. He too has much to be proud of.

The other Third Auxers were evacuated from Hammelburg a few days before the Americans arrived. Those who were unable

to walk were loaded on a train. Fisher became train surgeon and Sensenbach his assistant. Their adventures have already been related.

The only member of Team No. 11 who missed Hammelburg was Tansley. At the time the other Third Auxers left Limburg, Tansley volunteered for duty at a hospital for prisoners of war in Heppenheim. When he boarded his train late in January, three P-47's descended out of the sky. He dashed for cover. It was too late. Flying fragments cut his face and caused a painful eye injury. A less conscientious man would have given up. Not Tansley. Something told him that he was needed at Heppenheim. The next day he started again.

Heppenheim was located on the Bergstrasse, halfway between Frankfurt and Karlsruhe. It had a large, permanent hospital that had been built for disabled soldiers at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. At the time of Tansley's arrival this building was jammed with Allied war casualties. There were about three hundred Americans and an equal number of French, Russians, Serbs, Czechs, Greeks, and Slovaks. Of these, the French had fared best. They were looked after by four French medical officers. The Russians had a Slovak doctor. The wounded from the Balkan countries also had a doctor. But the Americans had none and their condition certainly showed it.

Tansley arrived at Heppenheim at the same time as a Captain Lee who had been captured in Normandy. Together they went on an inspection. They started with the first ward but they never finished it because what they saw was something that passed out of existence a hundred years ago: uncontrolled wound sepsis. These casualties had never had any medical attention whatsoever. They had simply been picked up on the battlefield and deposited at the hospital.

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That was all. Ordinary injuries that would have healed quickly with a simple debridement had produced deep infections that killed flesh, destroyed bone, and sapped vitality. Festering sores, massive sloughs, extensive suppurations, all the dreadful complications of the pre-Lister era presented themselves to the incredulous Americans. Pus was everywhere. It oozed through the paper bandages, soaked through the mattresses, and dripped on the floor. "Laudable pus" the medieval surgeons called it. But in the twentieth century there was nothing laudable about it. As an object lesson in the ravages of infection, these wounds were unique but as an example of unnecessary human suffering, they were shocking. Tansley and Lee wiped their brows. They did not even know where to start.

They made up a schedule. The wards had no light. The operating room did. The men decided to work on the wards by day and in the operating room by night. Surgical instruments were plentiful. Tansley pressed a French medical officer into service as anesthetist. Lee assisted. Tansley operated. Of the three, Lee was the busiest. He had to run the sterilizers, prepare the instruments, steady the patients, and ease their dying moments. Later, some of these chores were taken over by the less seriously wounded. But at first, Tansley and Lee had to do everything, from mopping the floor to burying the dead.

In his two months at Heppenheim, Tansley did over three hundred amputations. Many of these were double, some triple, and two quadruple. The death rate was appalling. But Tansley could not waver. The dead were dead. The living might yet be saved.

Not a day went by without its funerals. The ceremonies were conducted by a French priest who always spoke with touching fervor about "nos amis, les braves Américains."

Tansley attended several of these services. Always, the priest would find new words to express his country's debt to these heroes. At the end of the sermon, a friend of the departed would come forward to place the first shovelful of dirt on the coffin. Then the burial detail took over. Carefully they lifted the body out of the coffin, placed it in the grave, and proceeded with the burial. Heppenheim had only one coffin!

The hospital was commanded by a German Oberst, a Nazi tyrant of the worst sort. He never came near the Americans but he saw to it that their rations were at the starvation level. He even expropriated the Red Cross packages. Consequently, the Americans could not barter for food. Day by day the situation grew more desperate. During the final weeks, the diet consisted of bread and water. Every prisoner suffered from hunger edema. Tansley ran a series of blood counts. There wasn't a man with a hemoglobin of over fifty per cent.

And so the days dragged on. Reports filtered through that First Army had crossed the Rhine at Remagen and that Third Army had reached the river at Oppenheim. Opposite Heppenheim, Seventh Army drew up. Liberation was at hand.

On the day before the Americans crossed, the Oberst sent word that all the wounded were to be marched out! Tansley was furious. His patients could barely stand, let alone walk. But he had to be diplomatic. It was useless to tell the Oberst that an evacuation was tantamount to mass slaughter. Something more subtle was needed. Tansley sent a message back that his patients could not march out because they no longer had any clothes. Then he ordered every man to hide his clothes. When the Oberst stormed in to check on Tansley's statement, there wasn't so much as a sock to be found anywhere. The patients kept a straight face. Tansley snickered. The Oberst was livid.

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Patton's tanks crossed the Rhine on 24 March. They turned north towards Frankfurt but their proximity put the fear of God into the Oberst. He vanished and with him went the entire German garrison. All the prisoners now turned to Tansley. It was the most unspectacular surrender of the war. Not a shot was fired.

The first thing Tansley did was to inspect the building. What he saw made his blood boil. The Germans had secreted away enough food to feed all Heppenheim for six months! They had starved their prisoners and feasted themselves. No wonder the Oberst had fled. With such evidence he would have been lynched.

A German civilian came to see Tansley. It was Dr. Koenig, the leader of the local underground. Dr. Koenig was a furtive little man with shifting eyes and threadbare clothes. Speaking rapidly as if he were afraid to be caught, he told Tansley that the population of Heppenheim was ready to surrender and that the local Wehrmacht would lay down its arms, if Tansley gave the order. Only a small garrison of die-hard SS men remained to be persuaded and Dr. Koenig was sure that they would follow suit if Tansley could establish contact with American troops. This should not be difficult because the Americans had been reported at Bensheim, just three miles to the north. Dr. Koenig offered himself as a guide.

The request sounded logical and Tansley agreed. The two men walked through the main street without eliciting anything more than cursory attention. They went to a garage. Dr. Koenig seated himself at the wheel and motioned for Tansley to sit next to him. They drove off.

Outside the town, the road was deserted. Only a distant rumble betrayed the fact that a battle was going on. Koenig drove rapidly. Suddenly a road-block appeared. It was manned by SS men who seemed to recognize

Koenig. They dragged him out of the car and started questioning him. Although Tansley could not understand a word of what was said, he did not like the tone of the conversation and he began to reflect uneasily on his own strange role as mediator in this conflict. Dr. Koenig talked more and more volubly. The SS men became more and more threatening. Presently, Tansley too was dragged from the car. An SS man searched the vehicle. He found a white flag! That completed the evidence. The SS men had caught a traitor and a traitor's accomplice. They prepared for an execution on the spot.

Tansley felt sick. Was he to lose his life here at the hands of a bunch of fanatics? Would his body be tossed to the side of the road to be trampled and mutilated by enraged SS men? Would his widow ever know what happened to him? Would she even collect his insurance? These were the thoughts that passed through his head while a firing squad came forward.

A German jeep rounded the corner. It carried the commanding officer of the local Wehrmacht. The Wehrmacht man recognized Koenig and immediately guessed what was going on. A roadside execution involving an American would go hard with him when the town had to be surrendered. Koenig had not lied when he said that the Wehrmacht had no stomach for further fighting. The Wehrmacht man and the leader of the SS men entered into an argument. Terrified, Tansley listened. Who would prevail? On this depended Tansley's fate.

It was a draw. The SS man insisted on Koenig's execution but agreed to set Tansley free. The German was blindfolded and placed against a tree. A firing squad came forward. Their shots ran out. Koenig slumped. The SS men didn't even bother to cut his body down.

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Tansley returned to Heppenheim, shaking like a leaf. He had crawled through the eye of a needle.

The next day, 26 March, the Oberst and his entire staff returned to Heppenheim. Their flight had ended at Heidelberg. They had been severely reprimanded and ordered back to the hospital. The Oberst surrendered his sword to Tansley. It was a moment of supreme gratification. Two days later, the German was murdered by one of his own henchmen. To this day, his sword hangs in Tansley's living room.

The great day came on 27 March when Seventh Army crossed at Worms. Heppenheim was shelled and the hospital suffered some damage but no one was injured because the patients had all been taken to the basement. Tansley stationed himself at the main gate. At three o'clock, he saw an American patrol. He raised his hand in a greeting and within a few minutes, soldiers of the 3rd Division were shaking hands all around. Later in the day, Tansley showed his wretched patients to the Division Surgeon. This officer was so shocked that he ordered Tansley to report immediately to Army Headquarters at Kaiserslautern.

General Patch was aghast. When Tansley had finished, he called for his S-3.

"Colonel, see that Major Tansley gets all the trucks he needs to evacuate his patients immediately."

Next, General Patch called for the Army Surgeon and said:

"Colonel Rudolph, see that Major Tansley is decorated."

Then the General turned to Tansley.

"Major, if anybody puts any obstacles in your way, report to me."

The rest is history. Two ambulance companies dashed to Heppenheim, bells ringing and flags flying. An air strip was set up nearby. An evacuation hospital was moved

to Bensheim. A fleet of C-47's moved in. General Patch sent his private plane to take Tansley to Paris. It was a triumphant end to a fearsome experience.

In Paris, Tansley finally collapsed. His weight had dropped from 157 to 87 pounds. His left eye was causing unbearable pain. The nervous tension suddenly produced a reaction. He had to take to bed.

Recovery was rapid. Within a few weeks, his headaches had disappeared, his vision had stabilized, and his weight was edging back. In May, he flew home. The Third Aux is proud of him.

### *The Team of Major Crandall*

The last Third Aux team to come to grief in the Battle of the Bulge was that of Major Crandall. This team was with the 101st Airborne Division. It had landed in Normandy on 6 June. It had landed in Holland on 17 September. It had gone to the Division Rest Area at Mourmelon early in December and it was still at Mourmelon when the first alarm was sounded. "All I know is that there has been a break-through up there," said General McAuliffe to his Division staff at a conference on the evening of 17 December. "We've got to get up there."

To move 11,000 men requires 380 trucks. Mourmelon had no such number. SHAEF issued orders. The Transportation Corps got busy. Trucks were rushed to Mourmelon from points as far away as Rouen. And at five o'clock on the afternoon of 18 December, the entire 101st was on the way! It was a triumph of logistics.

Crandall's team still had the same composition as in Normandy. However, one man was not to be in on the final show-down. At Montmédy, Private Muska fell from his truck and broke a leg. He was sent back to Mourmelon.

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It was an all-night drive. Roads leading to Bastogne were jammed, either with men who were fleeing or with men who were going to do the fighting. On 19 December the situation was extremely critical. The Germans captured Wiltz, advanced to within three miles of Bastogne, and had salients both north and south of the town. If the Division Surgeon had known this, he would not have placed the 326th Medical Company where he did. It seemed to Lieutenant Colonel David Gold that the safest possible place for the clearing station would be well to the west. So far as he knew, this was Division Rear. All combat units were facing east and no Germans had yet been reported west of Bastogne. Therefore, he selected a site about eight miles out on the road to Marche. This was a crossroads called Herbaimont. The medical company arrived there on the

evening of 19 December and set up immediately. Being supposedly in a rear area, the station was entirely on its own. When disaster struck, the only armed protection consisted of a tank destroyer which arrived purely by accident.

The Germans were not sitting still. They were probing deep under cover of darkness. At eleven o'clock, a strong force crossed the Houffalize road, ran past Bertogne, and caught the hapless medical company completely by surprise. Natalle has given a graphic account of the events.

"When we arrived at Herbaimont, we could hear gun-fire in the distance. And it wasn't very far away either. Those sounds were familiar to us. We had heard them in

Aerial view of the Bastogne country.



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North Africa, in Sicily, in Normandy, in Holland, and now in Belgium.

During the afternoon, the tents went up. Major Crandall made up a duty roster. It was my fortune, good or bad, not to go on duty that night. I dug in. I constructed a neat foxhole about fifty yards from the surgical tent. At nine o'clock I opened my GI sleeping bag and tucked in for the night . . . at least I hoped it would be for the night.

I had just dozed off (actually it was two hours later) when I was aroused by a machine gun barrage. Bullets were flying everywhere. They passed right over my head. Man is by nature curious and I am human. I wanted to know what was going on. I raised my head and peered out over the edge of my foxhole. That was enough for me. I could see that the Germans were still playing for keeps.

In a few minutes, our area was lit up like day. The light was coming from our own vehicles that had been set afire by tracer bullets. As soon as the firing subsided, I crawled out of my foxhole and towards the surgical tent. I peered in. Everyone was prone as if lifeless. No one said a word. It looked like a morgue. And yet, I wasn't scared. I was too busy to be scared. It wasn't until an hour later that I got scared. To be scared you have to think. I wasn't thinking. I just looked. Some of the men were quaking with fear. Some sobbed quietly. Some moaned. Some lay still. I'll never forget that sight.

I crawled over to Major Crandall.

'Major, this looks bad. Can you figure it out?'

'Wish I could. It looks like Germany for us,' he said.

Major Crandall was a fearless man. He was a big man. He always knew how to conduct himself, no matter what the situation. Just to be near him gave you a feeling of security.

'Well, I guess the war is over for us.' I was going to eat those words.

By this time, the Germans were all over the area. They hollered, laughed, and made noise, just as Germans always do. It was bedlam. And to think that only a few minutes earlier, this same place was a peaceful meadow somewhere in the Ardennes.

As soon as we went outside, we could see the Germans. They were Panzer Grenadiers, the much-feared, hard-hitting tank men of Hitler's legions. The Fuehrer had saved them for this final plunge against the Allies. The officer in command was a typical Prussian. He was wearing well-polished, high, black boots and his uniform looked as if he had just come back from a Berlin pass. In his right eye was a monocle. I don't know why I remember all the details. I suppose it was because he was such a contrast with the ordinary fighting man. War is dirty. No one expects a Beau Brummel on the battlefield.

The commanding officer of the medical company surrendered to this German officer. There was no alternative. The Germans gave us thirty minutes to get on the trucks and clear the area. We did it in twenty. And all this time, the burning trucks became raging infernos. You could hear the cries of the men who had been caught inside.

I ran over to Captain Van Gorder who was talking German to the Nazi officer. Captain Van Gorder told me to go down to the crossroads and see if I could get any of the wounded out of the trucks. A German soldier was to go with me.

We ran as fast as we could. We tried to get near the trucks. The heat was intense. We looked at each other and shook our heads. There was nothing we could do. We turned back. Yes, we turned our backs on those wounded but their cries and pleas will forever remain in my memory.

Back at the tents, we found the trucks all set to pull out. I clambered aboard. A

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few minutes later, someone asked me if I could drive an American six-by-six. I said yes, although I hadn't driven one since the Third Aux made the trek across North Africa. I got behind the wheel. A German sat next to me, machine gun and all. We began the long, painful journey.

We didn't move very far that first night. Daylight found us in a hamlet whose name I don't remember. Our caravan of trucks, with their cargo of a hundred twenty-five prisoners, lined up on a little, narrow road. Lucky for us that the weather was dreary and gloomy. Otherwise we might have become the target for a dive bomber. I asked permission to get some water for the wounded. I saw two Catholic sisters and they helped me. I also gave some morphine to the patients in the back of the truck. Who was I to complain? Those casualties suffered infinitely worse.

At ten o'clock in the morning we moved out. We drove and stalled, drove and stalled, drove and stalled. It was endless. We crossed into Luxembourg. It was dark when we rolled into the next village and we had not had anything to eat since our capture. How long was this going to last?

We were told to bed down for the night in an old schoolhouse. We unloaded the wounded and carried them into the building. Afterwards, Sergeant Michaelson of the medical company said to me: 'I've saved some K rations. Let's eat.' We opened the cartons and started munching the crackers. 'Aren't these wonderful?' I said. It was the last K ration I ever had. I tried to rest a little but the cries of the wounded men haunted me. It was ghastly.

The next morning the ground was white with new-fallen snow. The air was still and cold. It was beautiful. I was reminded of the snowy landscapes of my native state of Iowa and I wondered if I would ever see Iowa again.

We left the wounded behind in this village. God knows what became of them. Then we boarded our trucks again. Just as we were getting under way, a young girl came running from a house, holding large slices of bread spread thick with jam. She was waving them in the air in a frantic effort to attract our attention before we pulled away. The trucks started rolling. The girl rushed towards me and practically threw the food at me. I caught it and shared it with the rest. It was wonderful. Circumstances determine the value of things. When you are hungry, you sell your soul for a hunk of bread. Bread! At home I never looked at bread. Now I treasured it. In the prison camps I saw men draw knives over a piece of bread. How weak we mortals be.

We started the third day of our captivity. In the bitter cold, without sufficient protection, we quickly burned up what little energy remained. The Germans had taken all our food away. We were completely at their mercy. All we could think of was our stomachs. Food became an obsession. It even superseded *femmes* which is ordinarily topic No. 1 among GI's.

On 23 December we arrived in Clerveaux. Here the Germans searched us, stripped us, and interrogated us. Here also, we were ordered to get out and walk. Our trucks were headed around to take German troops to the front. In Clerveaux and along the winding road that leads to the east, I saw what the Battle of the Bulge had done to our GI's. The ground was strewn with corpses. They lay just as they had fallen, frozen stiff in various grotesque positions. I tried not to look.

The first night out of Clerveaux, we reached what had once been a camp for the German Luftwaffe. The weather was extremely cold with lots of snow. The Germans pushed us into the unheated buildings and locked the doors. There were hundreds

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of us now (we had picked up other contingents in Clerveaux). The buildings had cement floors. There was no room to lie down. All we could do was stand up and try to sleep. We were getting desperate.

The Germans got us out at daybreak. It was the custom to line us up in long rows before each day's march. We would stand anywhere from one to three hours. This particular morning, it seemed interminable. My feet were numb with cold and my eyes burned like fire. Some of the fellows collapsed. We helped them to their feet.

Day after day we marched. We lost men from exhaustion, illness, lack of food, and accidents. We lived on berries that we found along the roadside and on frozen apple cores that were few and far between. Occasionally, we could get a farm laborer (usually a prisoner too) to toss us a rutabaga or sugar beet. When we got thirsty we ate snow.

At night we would go into bivouac, either along the roadside or in barns, chicken houses, stables, and places like that. That is where we got "lousey." Many a time we wished that we were outside instead of inside.

Somewhere along the road we put up in an old warehouse on a railroad siding. It was here that we got our first Red Cross parcel. It was a British parcel and the food was peculiarly British, if you know what I mean. But at this critical stage, food was food. I ate the hardtack as if it were crisp toast. I don't remember how many men were supposed to share a box, but it was too many. When we were through, we were still hungry.

Soon the fellows became a stampeding herd of cattle: unruly, unreasoned, undisciplined. The men who smoked back home were the first to suffer. They became irritable, jumpy, half-crazed. Some would cry out for their mother, wife, or sweetheart. These were the ones that you would have to

shake and slap to bring them back to their senses. They were completely demoralized. But this was no time to lose faith. Without faith, you were a dead duck.

At the warehouse, our great fear was a bombing raid. If this little rail siding ever became a target for tonight, we were done for. But providence was with us. The weather stayed cloudy.

The Germans tried to get enough box cars to transport us into Germany. They did not succeed, no doubt because of air raids on their rolling stock. No cars came so we were put back on the road. Yes, afoot. To know what that meant, you must realize that the Germans had taken many of our paraboots. In exchange they would sometimes give us their old, black, worn-out boots. At other times they did not bother to make any kind of replacement. And yet, we welcomed the road after the hours we spent sleeping spoon-fashion in the old warehouse. At least we were in the fresh air.

We marched on empty stomachs. At home, I used to enjoy getting hungry because of the meal that was waiting for me. But here there was nothing to look forward to. In fact, we might never eat again. We learned to live with those hunger pains.

We took a somewhat northeasterly course into Germany. We did not follow any roads. It was a cross-country hike in the strictest sense of the word, through dense forests, over rugged hills, across small streams, and even across fences.

The town of Prum showed itself one bright, cold day at about noon. We had already marched some twenty miles. The guards were getting tired and they wanted to put up in Prum for the night. They were mad as hell when word came down that we would continue. And we were mad too. But fate was with us. That night the Ninth Air Force practically demolished Prum. A fellow prisoner told me later that Prum

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'just doesn't exist any longer.' We would have been in that raid, had it not been for some quirk of circumstance.

On we went. The next town was Gerolstein. Just an ordinary, typical, small German town. We got there late at night on Christmas Eve. We were served some kind of soup. It tasted terrible. Yes, it tasted terrible, even though we had been without food for several days. It must have been practically poison.

But Christmas Day was the pay-off. The Germans came in and asked if anyone would like to volunteer for work. They offered a special ration to anyone who volunteered. That sounded good to me. Moreover, anything was better than that smelly jail they had us in. So I volunteered. Me and 59 others.

We lined up. Feeling ran high in Gerolstein because the town had just been raided. In fact, some of the fires were still smoldering. The Germans began separating us into smaller groups. We all became suspicious. No one said a word. We had heard about the Malmédy massacre and we were sure that

we had volunteered for one mass execution. It was a dismal spot. What a way to die.

But no firing squad came forward. We were put to work cleaning up the town in groups of five and six. We worked hard, too. We had just finished when lo! and behold, another raid came along. That wiped out all we did plus some. The 'special ration' was a dry crust of black bread and some more of the green hornet soup. Then we shoved off again.

The next town was Mayen. We marched through about dusk. The water mains had all been torn up by air raids and the women were carrying water for miles in buckets and pails. I got the impression of utter chaos. People were dashing hither and yon without rhyme or reason. It was cold, very cold this night. We were kept standing outside for several hours as per usual, while the Germans argued what to do next. They finally put us up in a cement factory, of all places. We got some pretty fair soup at this place. Funny how I remember our stopping points mainly according to whether we ate or not. The cement factory was a wicked place to

"We were packed sixty to a box car."

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sleep but we slept anyway because we were exhausted. As a matter of fact, anytime we sat down we fell asleep. When you woke up, you saw a conglomeration of dirty, unshaven, starving GI's that no top sergeant would give a nickel for. We looked like a bunch of ragamuffins. No mother would have recognized her son.

Finally we reached a rail terminal and boarded a train. We were packed sixty to a box car. It was so crowded that you could hardly move. Then the Germans sealed the doors. They actually bolted them shut. Even the little windows were all boarded up. No daylight ever penetrated those cars. There was no food, no water, no latrine. We answered nature's calls where we were. And this lasted for days.

I don't know how long we were in those box cars. We had no way of telling. Days and nights were all alike. We arrived in our first POW camp on New Year's Day. It was a cold, bleak morning. The day before, a large batch of prisoners had been kept standing in the bitter cold so long that many of them died of exposure. We could still see the corpses. It was horrible. This was the notorious Stalag IV-B at Muhlberg.

Have you ever eaten spoiled sauerkraut without anything to go with it . . . cold? Well, this was our first meal at Stalag IV-B. It made most of us violently ill. Next to the green hornet soup, this stale sauerkraut was the worst thing I ever tasted.

The Germans were deathly afraid of typhus and they took great pains to delouse us. They herded us into what I thought was a gas chamber. It turned out to be a big, improvised bathhouse. That was the first and last shower I ever had in Germany. After the bath, we all lined up for a shot in the arm. The fluid in the syringe was a dark, thick solution. Whatever it was, it carried a terrific wallop. My arm was sore for weeks.

Back at Clerveaux the Germans had ques-

tioned and searched us. They didn't do a very good job of it though and many of us had slipped through with our personal equipment intact. We thought that we had outsmarted the Germans. Nothing could be further from the truth. At Muhlberg, they really gave us the third degree. They literally cleaned us out—money, rings, watches, fountain pens, pocket knives, anything that had any value. Of course, many of these articles had already found new owners before we arrived at Muhlberg. I witnessed many an exchange of a wedding ring for a slice or two of bread. Nothing counted for much, except edibles. Hungry people do not deliberate. They act!

After this shakedown, the Germans questioned us. They made a complete record of every prisoner, including a picture. And they were more thorough than the sergeant at the induction station back home. There is an agreement between warring nations that each side register its POW's. The Germans violated every agreement except that one, probably because it was to their own benefit. I bet you they could tell you to this day where my parents were born.

It took all day to be processed. We finished at ten o'clock at night. It was bitter cold with a fierce northwest wind blowing snow into big drifts. We marched through this snow for more than an hour and finally were told to enter a barracks. All the bunks were occupied. There was no heat, of course. All we could do was sleep on the floor. That was Stalag IV-B.

The following day dawned clear but extremely cold. There was nothing to do, so in spite of the cold, I went outside and walked around the huge stockade. Stalag IV-B was an international camp. Every nationality was represented. I think I met them all. Men from Russia, men from the Balkans, men from England and America, thirty thousand of them. Many could speak

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English and the stories they told were incredible. I ran into an old buddy who was captured on D Day in Normandy. He had just received a package from home. In the package were some socks. I had no socks and this fellow offered me his. It restored my faith in humanity.

Muhlberg was our home for only one week. Again, the Germans sorted out the latest arrivals and prepared to move them on. We were on their list. There was always something intriguing about these moves. I never was able to diagnose it but I suppose it was because we figured that the next place could not possibly be worse. And yet, it always was. We traveled in the now-familiar box cars. Our direction continued southeast. The farther we got, the colder it got. I think we traveled for several days.

When the German guards opened the doors of the box cars, we were no longer able to stand. Days of starvation and refrigeration had made mummies out of us. We could neither think nor move. The Germans wanted us to line up on the station platform. We did not jump out of the cars. We toppled out. On that ice-covered ground, we were as helpless as a youngster on his first pair of skates. We landed on top of one another and we did not get unscrambled for a long time. Finally, order was restored.

We were now in Gorlitz, in southeastern Germany. Stalag VIII-A was far worse than IV-B. There was less food, less heat, less of everything. The compound was huge. We were quartered in long wooden barracks, made of tar paper. Bunks were stacked three high. Six or seven men had to share a section. The boards on the bunks were narrow and were fully three inches apart. It would be difficult to make them any more uncomfortable.

Life ebbed on at VIII-A; for some it ebbed out. Prisoners died from starvation,

from exposure, from exhaustion, from tuberculosis, and from sheer hopelessness. Life just wasn't worth living under those circumstances.

For a month we lingered. Then, on St. Valentine's Day, the blow came. The Russians had been gaining ground around Breslau and Liegnitz. They were not far from Gorlitz. The Germans decided to evacuate us.

We set out on foot, rain pelting down, wind whistling. When you are cold and starved and discouraged, rain is the last straw. We were at the end of our strength. But we knew who was the boss so we marched.

You ask how we were able to march? To an athlete, there is something known as second wind. At Gorlitz on St. Valentine's Day we got our second wind. We struggled on, not as human beings but as automatons. The will to live waxes as physical strength wanes.

We marched all day and all night. I don't know what made me do it but I got the crazy idea that I could fall out and hide myself. At Bautzen I carried out my scheme under cover of darkness. I slept in an alley. The next morning I realized that this was no solution. I hastened on and rejoined my companions. They wondered about my attempt to get away. I discouraged them from trying it.

For the next five weeks we marched. Sometimes we would march ten kilometers, sometimes thirty or forty. There was no rhyme or reason to it. We zigzagged across the countryside like hunted animals. Over hills and dales, across ice and snow, through thick and thin we marched. It was an endurance contest.

We ate when we could find something to eat and we drank from roadside ditches, regardless of how contaminated the water was. A sugar beet, picked up in a hog pen,

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was a treat. Try it sometime. Then there was a day when I caught a chicken. We killed it and carried it for two days before getting a chance to eat it. We finally ate it raw.

February and March is the wet season in Germany. It either rained or froze. Towards the end, the sun would occasionally come out. Rain or shine, we marched on.

We suffered many casualties. Fellows would fall out from hunger and fatigue. Some would be picked up by farmers but the majority died. On those wind-swept plains, a man did not have a chance. Every day, the weaving column got smaller. Every day, the survivors got weaker. Finally, even the Germans could see that it was no use continuing. On 23 March they herded us into an abandoned brick factory near Duderstadt. It was filthy. The stench alone would knock you out. And yet we stayed in this place two weeks. We had to. We were too sick to go on.

Our group now started breaking up. I was told to go to a small town called Immingerode. It was only a mile away but it took me three hours to get there! I could no longer walk properly. I had beriberi, I was infested with lice, and my skin came off in great big flakes. I had shrunk from a healthy 200 pounds to a measly 100.

At Immingerode, I was quartered in a school house with a bunch of dying American and British POW's. They were even worse off than I. Many of them could not walk at all. The Germans managed to get a little soup to us every day but we could no longer assimilate it. Now at last, the weather began to get nice and I knew that spring was just around the corner. Each day of sunshine I went outside to absorb all I could. The rest of the time I just sat and killed lice. I sat like that for two weeks, watching prisoners die all around me. Spring came too late for them.

One day the Germans came with a wagon and moved us all back to Duderstadt and that is where we were liberated. On 9 April I looked out through the grimy window of the brick factory and saw an American jeep. It was the greatest sight I have ever seen.

From that day began the long period of restoration. When I arrived in England, I bumped into a former Third Auxer, Cecilia Kirschling. She did not even recognize me. I had lost my hair, my sight was poor, my hearing was impaired, and I was unable to talk intelligently. No wonder she did not recognize me.

Seven months and seven Army hospitals later, I was again out on my own. Man's memory is short. We are prone to forget the worst and remember the best. So it is with me. But even if I did remember the worst, I still could not do justice to it. The experience was too terrifying. All I have tried to do is convey some idea of the horrors of my three months in the concentration camps. If I have succeeded in that, I am satisfied."

Crandall's team remained together as far as Muhlberg. While Natale and the other enlisted men were evacuated to Gorlitz, the officers went to a camp at Schubin in the Polish corridor. This was a well-run camp that held over fifteen hundred Americans. The prisoners had their own classes, maintained a library, and kept in touch with the outside world through secret radios. Red Cross packages arrived here with more regularity than at other camps and the contents of these packages would fetch anything from eggs to firewood in the black market. Every prisoner had his Smoky Joe. Messengers distributed the latest BBC news. In fact, life at Schubin was almost human.

It was 15 January when the Third Auxers arrived at Schubin, and the Russians had

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already launched their long-awaited offensive. The fighting of the previous summer had carried the Red Army across the vast stretch of territory between the Dnieper and the Vistula but it had ground to a halt in front of Warsaw. Here, the Germans had rallied and they had spent the winter months fortifying their positions. On 12 January, the fighting flared again.

The Russians had chosen their time well. Poland is a flat country and the frozen ground made good footing for tanks. The Reds took no chances. They deployed 300 divisions and heavy tank concentrations along the entire 400-mile front. Against this, the Germans could muster only 160 divisions, but they had the advantage of prepared defenses and shortening supply lines. It was a gigantic battle.

First, the Russians tore a broad gap south of Warsaw. Next, they thrust across the Vistula north of the city. By-passed, Warsaw fell on 17 January. Suddenly, the Germans found themselves on the run. Overwhelmed by the tremendous scope and weight of the Russian Army, they could not organize their secondary defenses. Within a week the Russians swept forward a hundred miles. Bydgoszcz fell on 23 January. Schubin was next.

On the morning of 21 January, the Schubin prisoners were lined up on the drill field in the usual freezing weather. A German officer addressed them over the loud-speaker:

"Americans! Schubin is being threatened by the forces of that infamous Communist Zhukov. Prepare to evacuate. You will be fully protected."

"Protect us? Against what?" sneered Crandall. "Who the hell does he think he is. Just let me stay right here."

"Me too," said Dworkin. "When I joined the Third Aux, Wallie Haynes told me that we would be marching to the sound of guns. Guess he was right."

As if to underscore Dworkin's words, guns rumbled in the distance. Outside, long lines of fleeing civilians moved slowly towards the west. Camp guards paced nervously up and down. The signs were unmistakable. The Russians were just over the horizon.

Back in their barracks the prisoners surveyed their dismal surroundings. Pathetically, they uncovered their possessions. Their clothes were in rags, their shoes worn thin, their blankets tattered and torn. One man carefully wrapped a loaf of black bread in a dirty rag. Another dismantled a Red Cross package. Still another crammed a Smoky Joe in his pocket. Everybody grabbed something. But the yield was pitifully small. How could they survive the rigors of the long march ahead?

A light snow began to fall. Bugles sounded. Men fell in. Guards barked commands. Gates swung open. Lines started moving.

"By God," said Rodda, casting an eye over the grotesquely swathed figures, "We look just like Napoleon's Army retreating from Moscow."

Ahead stretched a white expanse, unbroken except for bleak forests and frozen lakes. Here no friendly villages, no neatly kept farms, no sheltering hills. Just miles and miles of wasteland with howling winds and swirling snow. This was forbidding country, desolate and inhospitable. This was where the proudest armies in the world had met defeat.

The retreating Germans hardly knew which way to turn. The Russians gave them no respite. Following the break-through at Warsaw, German tanks rushed to Lodz to meet the advance. But Zhukov drove his left wing south and his right wing north and before the Germans could make any further move he was threatening Schubin. The Germans now dispatched strong reinforcements to this sector but before these arrived, the Russian tanks had wheeled again and dashed

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for Posen. The German generals were going mad. They always had a date with battle a hundred miles away.

The effect of the Russian advance was to cut off all roads leading west and south of Schubin. The escape route for the Germans lay to the northwest, towards Stettin. The main roads were unsafe. Soon, the long, straggling column found itself strung out over roads that were little more than cart tracks. Americans, Germans, and Poles quickly became intermingled. The Germans were mostly farmers that had been resettled in Poland during the war. They were fleeing from the Russians with their families and belongings. These people were hostile. Men would shake their fists and women would spit at the Americans who looked more like vagabonds than soldiers. A few Poles took pity on the prisoners and let them throw their bundles on the family cart. The German guards frowned on this but did not hesitate to put their own baggage on the lone vehicle that they had salvaged from Schubin. It was a horse-drawn cart!

In deadly fear of the Communists, the Germans maintained a brisk pace. At intervals, they would open their knapsacks and fortify themselves with bread and schnapps. For the prisoners, there was neither food nor rest. When night came, many were near collapse.

At Seriniki the column came to a halt on one of the huge estates that were so common in Poland before the war. The gateposts announced that this property belonged to the Baron von Rosen. A large manor house loomed in the center.

"Well, at least we are going to hobnob with the nobility, boys," said Crandall, trying to infuse a note of humor.

"Looks more like we're going to hobnob with the baron's cattle," said Van Gorder. "I bet they'll put us up with the pigs."

Van Gorder was right. While the guards

took over a wing of the main building, the prisoners moved into the sheds and barns. There was much delay. For more than an hour the men stood in freezing weather in the courtyard. Crandall demanded to see the German officer in charge. This was a Colonel Schneider, a dentist who had been riding all day on the horse cart, wrapped in blankets. Crandall found him ensconced in the baron's study with a glass of schnapps and a steaming meal.

"Sir, these prisoners are in pitiful condition. They need medical attention. I request permission to hold sick call."

"Go ahead. Don't bother me," was the answer between gulps.

Third Auxers went to work. What they saw was even worse than they had feared. There were hundreds of cases of blistered feet, frozen ears, sore throats, and dysentery. Crandall broke the medical chest open. It had nothing but sulfa drugs and charcoal tablets! Wearily, the Third Auxers set about their task. Crandall went back to the Sanitäts Offizier.

"Sir, these men are being marched to their grave. There are at least three hundred who cannot continue. I request that they be left behind in charge of our medical officers."

"Well, that's too bad. But I have my instructions. Every man who cannot march is to be shot."

Crandall felt like kicking the man in the teeth. But he had to be diplomatic. Carefully, he explained that there was such a thing as the Geneva Red Cross Convention. Darkly, he hinted what might happen if those rules were not observed. The German relented. He was beginning to see the handwriting on the wall.

The next morning, the Third Auxers segregated the worst cases. Crandall selected Rodda and Van Gorder to stay behind. For them, the long march was over. For the

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others, the experience of the previous day was now repeated.

The men lined up. Again there was a long wait while the Sanitäts Offizier finished his breakfast. When he finally appeared, he called one of his non-coms and asked if all the barns had been searched. He was told that this had been done. Unconvinced, he ordered a German squad to fire blindly into every barn and haystack. Several Americans were wounded. It was a Malmédy massacre in miniature. Third Auxers boiled. But there was nothing they could do.

The march lasted all day. Here and there, men began to drop out. Their white hope was to be picked up by the Russians. A few did get picked up. The rest froze to death.

Crandall and Dworkin were at the rear of the column. They saw a commotion. An American prisoner had fallen heavily on the icy ground and passed out. Whether it was exhaustion or a skull fracture was difficult to determine. It might be both. At any rate, the man needed treatment. With a little care, he might survive. Without it, he would surely die.

Crandall looked around for the horse cart. It was just rounding the corner, the Sanitäts Offizier chewing on his cigar.

"Sir, I request permission to place this man on the cart," said Crandall.

"Impossible," was the answer. "The cart is reserved for me."

"The dirty so-and-so," said Crandall, out of earshot. Then he turned towards Dworkin. "Let's see if we can fix up a litter."

They carried the casualty to the next village. Once again, Crandall addressed himself to the Sanitäts Offizier. Quoting the rules of the Geneva Convention, he explained that a serious casualty could not be left behind without medical attention. The Sanitäts Offizier nodded consent. The issue was now between Crandall and Dworkin. Crandall won. He stayed. The column

moved on, Dworkin with it. "And now there was only one."

For seven weeks Dworkin and his men marched over the frozen plains of Germany from Schubin to Hammelburg. The winter of 1945 was unusually cold. Every day was a test of endurance, every night a battle against the elements. Dworkin would never allow his men to stand still. During the long waits, they "danced" on their feet and at night they slept with their boots under their arms. In spite of these precautions, many men came down with frozen feet. Dworkin always tried to take these unfortunates to a farmhouse. When this was not possible he could only notify the Germans in the next village that there were road casualties. The majority of them undoubtedly died and when the column finally reached Hammelburg after a 600-mile march, it had shrunk to half its original size. This was the German version of the Bataan death march.

On 13 March the survivors entered the gates of Hammelburg. "Entered" is the wrong word. They stumbled in. Dworkin was down to 125 pounds from his usual 200. He was wearing an American knitted cap, a torn battle-jacket, German corduroy trousers, shoes bound up with twine, and a seven-weeks' beard. The Sanitäts Offizier now felt called upon to make a speech. He lined his men up and addressed them as follows:

"American soldiers! According to my instructions. I have saved you from those unspeakable criminals, the Communists. Without my constant vigilance, you would now be in the hands of Zhukov and his henchmen. I now entrust you to the care of the commanding officer at Hammelburg."

"Yeah?" sneered Dworkin. "Well, I hope that the bastard isn't going to save us from the Americans too. That fellow has the most perverted idea of saving humanity."

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At Hammelburg Dworkin met the other Third Auxers. For the first time since he was captured, he bedded down without fear of what the next day would bring. Two weeks later Task Force Baum came crashing through the gates and Dworkin disappeared in the darkness and confusion of that melee. He was recaptured the next morning.

When Hammelburg was evacuated, Dworkin was part of a large column that marched to Nurnburg. It arrived on 5 April, simultaneously with a flight of American bombers. The raid was one of the worst. Bombs rained down, not only on the city but also on the prisoners' compound. Dworkin ducked, drawing his jacket over his head. This maneuver, clumsy though it was, probably saved his life. A bomb fell near him. Tons of dirt were shifted. Dworkin was buried. He remembers the awful weight on his chest, the dreadful suction, the realization that he was buried alive. Then he thought of home. His whole Army experience flashed before his mind. Had he survived this far, only to come to an end now? He lost consciousness.

Dworkin was saved by a quick-thinking German guard. The man grabbed a shovel, freed Dworkin's head, and pulled him out. No Third Auxer came closer to death.

The next few hours were full of terror. The bombers came back over and over again. When they finally left for good, there were over fifty dead and hundreds of wounded among the prisoners. Dworkin went around in a daze. But he was impotent. It was a ghastly experience, fortunately the last one of its kind. From Nurnburg on, things began to look up.

The prisoners (at least those who were still able to walk) were marched off in a south-easterly direction. They crossed the Danube at Regensburg. Gradually, the imminence of the German defeat began to have its effects on the German guards. They no

longer paid any attention to their prisoners. Dworkin decided to take matters in his own hands. One evening, while the rest of the prisoners were going through the roll-call routine, he simply walked away. He went to a nearby farmhouse and told the farmer in his best German that he was attaching himself to the household "for quarters and rations." The farmer welcomed him with open arms and when Dworkin saw that there was plenty of room and plenty of food, he went back and invited five of his buddies to join him.

Meanwhile, the farmer had told his wife to prepare the best dinner that she could cook. It was food such as the men had not seen for months. In the midst of this feast, there was a knock on the door. Dworkin told the farmer to see who it was. Imagine his surprise when he saw the German guards, hat in hand, begging for permission to share the farmer's hospitality! These same sadistic, ham-handed, blood-thirsty blackguards who had dogged Dworkin every minute of the day for four long months now had the crust to apply to him for protection from the advancing American Army. Dworkin was furious but it was still too early to show his true state of mind. Reluctantly, he agreed to let the Germans come in.

The Germans joined in the dinner. There were half a dozen of them and after they had downed innumerable steins of good Bavarian beer, they asked Dworkin if they could bring their captain in too. In that way, they would enjoy double protection. The captain did not have to be asked twice and the evening wound up in an orgy of eating and drinking.

The next day, Dworkin ordered the farmer to kill a pig so that there would be plenty of food. News quickly spread that an American advance unit had established headquarters at the farm of Klaus Schmidt. The burgomeister came to pay his respects. Dworkin asked him for a car so that he

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could disport himself according to his dignity. The villagers began to acclaim Dworkin as the man to save them from the furies of the American tanks. They gave him the key to the town and courted his favor at every turn. For three days, Dworkin and his companions lorded it over the countryside. They lived like kings and settled all disputes with a magnificent "Das macht nichts aus."

On the fourth day, roving SS troops were reported in the vicinity. That was bad news. While Dworkin and his friends went into hiding, the German captain went out to meet the SS men. "All we have here is one sick American doctor," he explained. "He will not last much longer. You better leave him alone." Meanwhile, the "sick, American doctor" ordered another pig killed so that he could gorge himself at the next meal. The SS men left.

The next day, American troops were reported nearby and the roles were reversed. Dworkin scoured the roads while the Germans hid out in the basement. This game lasted for several more days until finally on 1 May an honest-to-goodness American tank entered the village. Dworkin was the welcoming committee and he accepted his liberation with mixed emotions. He was just beginning to enjoy his role of benevolent despot!

The Americans hitchhiked to Nurnburg, stopping at Velden on the way. Here, they saw many of their former guards behind the barbed wire of the enclosure, including the Herr Sanitäts Offizier! "Look at how you Americans are treating us," complained the fellow. "And I saved you from the Russians!" "Nuts to you," said Dworkin.

Dworkin spent a month in Paris. He ate six meals a day, took a shower morning and evening, and enjoyed his liberty to the full. Then he was repatriated. Dworkin's record stands for all to see. Few Third Auxers can tell a more exciting tale.

When the column of American prisoners turned its back on the estate of the Baron Von Rosen on the morning of 22 January, Rodda and Van Gorder found themselves in a no-man's land. Their problem was to establish contact with the Russians as soon as possible. They moved the wounded into the main manor house, posted a watch, and struck out for the nearest town, Exin.

Exin looked like a graveyard. There was not a soul to be seen. Everybody had gone into hiding in anticipation of a Russian holocaust. Uncertain of how to proceed, the two Third Auxers walked down the deserted streets in search of a clue. On the main square, they were stopped by excited shouts from a store: "Polski!" It was the town druggist who wanted to make it known that he was Polish. The Americans answered with matching enthusiasm: "Amerikanski!" It was hard to say who was more relieved. Without a shot, the town passed into American hands.

Rodda and Van Gorder entered the drug-store. They wanted to explain why they had come to Exin. They might as well have tried to explain Einstein's relativity theory. Within a few minutes, the shop was filled with Poles who had heard that the Americans had arrived. They all wanted to celebrate. The druggist got out his best bottle of schnapps and started passing drinks. There was a toast to Roosevelt, a toast to Eisenhower, a toast to Bradley, and toasts all the way down to the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group.

Tongues came loose and the Third Auxers now heard for the first time the inside story of the German occupation. It was a long story of woe, a story that was interrupted by the entrance of a middle-aged woman who said that she was the wife of the town doctor. Her husband had been abducted by the Germans many months ago and the civilian population was in desperate need of medical attention. Would the American

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doctors come to her house and see the worst cases? It was a request that was hard to refuse. The Third Auxers set up shop.

As soon as word got about that there were two Americans doctors in town, sick and injured people converged on the doctor's house. There were cases of typhus, diphtheria, dysentery, tuberculosis, boils, and almost every other imaginable condition. Rodda and Van Gorder went to work forthwith and they finished the day with a sumptuous dinner of roast beef, the first they had had in many a moon.

The next morning, while they were still asleep, the doctor's wife rushed in to say that Russian tanks had been reported on the outskirts of the town. There was only one thing to do: go and meet the Russians. Simple as this sounded, the job was tricky at best. As yet, the Russians had seen no Americans and they were great hands at shooting first. Would they accept the Americans for what they were? On this depended success or failure.

Rodda and Van Gorder left the doctor's house, prepared for the worst. They headed for the main square but they had hardly gone halfway when out of a side street came the sound of an approaching tank. Presently it rounded the corner. The Third Auxers stood motionless. They were looking at a steel giant, surmounted by a monstrous gun. Riding on the turret were a dozen Russian infantrymen. The Russians seemed as surprised as the Americans.

The gun turret swung around with such speed that it knocked a number of the Russian soldiers off their perch. The Americans would have burst out in laughter, had their plight not been so serious. Here they were in the middle of a Polish village looking at a Russian tank and shaking hands with the muzzle of a 110 mm gun. One false move by a trigger-happy Russian and they would be dead ducks.

"The stinkers!" said Van Gorder.

"Speak the speech, do your stuff, stop the Russ, Jack. This is your chance to get the Congressional Medal of Honor," said Rodda.

"Oh yeah?"

The Russian soldiers advanced and Van Gorder explained in his best German how two Americans came to be in Exin. The Russians just looked dumb. They had never seen any Americans. The soldiers called the tank sergeant, the tank sergeant called his company commander, the company commander called the battalion commander, and eventually there was a great hurrah after which Americans and Russians shook hands all around. It was the first meeting of the Allies on the Eastern front.

If the Russians had appeared jovial for a minute, they quickly returned to the grim business of chasing Germans. Rodda and Van Gorder looked at each other. They had not enjoyed their experience particularly and there was no telling what the next tank sergeant would do. They decided to return to the doctor's house.

The tanks were followed by infantry units. This was an Army that moved on its feet. Except for their tanks, the Russians appeared ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-equipped. Even their standard operating procedure appeared ill-conceived. It consisted of a house-to-house search for food, liquor, and women. Exin was plunged into despair. More and more victims of Russian violence found their way to the doctor's house. Rodda and Van Gorder converted the office into an operating room. Soon they were wholly absorbed in their task.

It was not until several days later that the first Russian medical detachment arrived. It was commanded by a woman with the rank of major. She was a dour and dumpy creature who walked in on the Third Auxers with a glint in her eye. The first thing

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she saw was a wounded civilian with a cast on his leg. The Russians never used plaster casts at the front. She immediately concluded that she had walked into a secret German hospital. Her first words were: "You are all under arrest!" Vainly Van Gorder tried to make her understand. He just got more and more involved. The woman motioned to one of her flunkies: "Get rid of these Fascists," she said. It looked like Siberia for the Third Auxers.

The town druggist saved the day. He spoke Russian and made the woman understand. Rodda and Van Gorder were allowed to stay at their station and the Russians took over a school building across the street. Their aid station had only the crudest equipment and yet it was over a hundred miles from the nearest hospital. Abdominal casualties were placed in a far-off corner where they died without benefit of surgery. When the Russian major heard that the Americans were operating on such patients with good results, she asked if they would come over and undertake the surgical treatment of all wounds involving the abdomen. Rodda and Van Gorder obliged. They did not know what they were letting themselves in for.

The Russians did not believe in heating their operating room. Neither did they believe in lighting it, except with candles. When Rodda started pouring ether, a lighted candle was at his side, ready to ignite the fumes. But there were no fumes for the simple reason that ether does not evaporate at freezing temperatures. One hazard offset the other. Van Gorder opened the abdomen. The tissues steamed like a boiling kettle. Within a few minutes, Van Gorder's fingers were numb with cold. But he completed the operation all the more quickly and the patient lived. The Russians were flabbergasted.

The schedule at Exin was truly back-breaking. The Third Auxers had to look after the civilians, help the Russians, treat the American casualties from the estate of

the Baron Von Rosen, and keep an ear to the ground. For two weeks they tried to keep up with the work but it was obvious that Exin held out no future for them. No wonder that they cast about for greener pastures. The greener pasture seemed to be, of all places, at Schubin! There was a rumor that Schubin harbored an American doctor. Furthermore, Schubin lay in the direction of liberty. The Russian drive had come to a halt on the Oder and any flight to the west would stop there. The Third Auxers decided to try their luck to the east. Who could tell but what they might wind up in Moscow!

The American doctor at Schubin was none other than Crandall. Crandall had dropped out of the line at Inowroclaw to stay with a march casualty. He took his patient to a school building in the center of the town, little realizing that he was sticking his nose into a hornet's nest. Inowroclaw was in German hands but the Poles were rapidly mobilizing their underground army and they had a secret headquarters in the very building where Crandall hoped to find shelter. The first man Crandall met was a Polish vigilante who maintained contact with the Russians by means of a secret radio. Crandall hardly knew whether this improved his situation or made it worse. Since there was no answer to this question, he concentrated on his patient. And with good effect. The man responded so dramatically to rest and warmth that Crandall quickly dropped his diagnosis of fractured skull.

The retreating German forces were rallying at Inowroclaw. It was obvious that they intended to defend the town. That evening, the Polish underground workers met in the basement of the school building. The Germans had been tipped off. They staged a raid. The Poles fled but they were shot in cold blood as they ran. The Germans searched the building and came upon Crandall with his casualty. The two men decided

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on a ruse. While Crandall explained to the Germans how he came to be in this spot, the other American conveniently lapsed into a deep coma from which no shouts or imprecations could arouse him. Pointing at the bloody bandages on the man's head, Crandall cried indignantly: "As an American medical officer, I am dedicated to the welfare of this seriously injured soldier. The rules of the Geneva Convention say so. Anybody who interferes is nothing but a miserable scoundrel. Cease and desist!" The Germans were completely fooled. They withdrew.

The next day the heat was on. First, small parties of Russians tried to cross the canal that ran through the town but they were hurled back by strong German forces on the opposite bank. As the battle developed, the Russians were joined by the Poles and the school house came under concentrated fire. Crandall and his companion hid in the basement, expecting to be blown up any moment. Several shells did hit the building but the Americans escaped injury. Finally, the combined Russian and Polish force came in such numbers that the Germans were overwhelmed. They abandoned their positions and fled for their lives. By evening, Inowroclaw was in Russian hands.

The situation for the Americans remained critical. How could they prove their identity under these damaging circumstances? The first Russians to reach the school house were in no mood to listen, even if they had been able to understand English. They seized the two nondescript characters and were just about to consign them to the OGPU when a Russian officer who knew a smattering of English appeared on the scene. He listened to Crandall and told him to look after the Russian casualties, pending the arrival of a medical detachment. Crandall breathed a sigh of relief, even though he was immediately pitched into the discourag-

ing task of trying to bring the doomed back to life.

Crandall worked at this post for several days. Then, the Russians moved on and he made his way back to Schubin without touching the town of Exin. Thus it was that Crandall, Rodda, and Van Gorder had a reunion in the very town whence the Germans had evacuated them. Schubin was still a dismal spot but it marked the beginning of the trail to freedom. The Third Auxers were overjoyed.

During the two weeks they worked at Schubin, the Third Auxers averaged two hours of sleep out of twenty-four. Casualties poured in from the front to the north. Towards the west, the Russians were already standing on the Oder, but towards the north, the front was only ten miles away. Schubin was the shoulder of a deep salient into German territory.

A Soviet commissar installed himself in the city hall. He sent word that he wished to see the Americans. Crandall, Rodda, and Van Gorder put on their Sunday best and presented themselves at the appointed hour. Far from seeing a fierce-looking Communist with unkempt mien and savage manners, they came face to face with a glib and polished bureaucrat who proved to be far better informed than his counterparts in the Army. This was the first educated Russian to cross the path of the Americans and he was a living demonstration of how the Soviet regime operated in the field. There was no waste motion.

"You are the American doctors from the prison camp?"

"Check."

"I have orders to clear Schubin of all foreigners. When can you leave?"

"Today. But where do we go?"

"The road to Berlin isn't open yet."

"What about the road to Moscow?"

"It is long and arduous."

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"Never mind that. But we will need a pass. Your soldiers almost shot us once."

"You will have your pass."

"Heil Stalin."

"Heil Roosevelt."

The Third Auxers consulted their map. Moscow was eight hundred miles to the east. They should be able to make it in a week.

The next day, 22 February, a convoy left for Bromberg and the Third Auxers hitched a ride. The trucks had open cabs and caught the full blast of the wind, a wind that gathered in violence as the day wore on. The Russians had fur-lined parkas and heavy wraps but the Third Auxers had nothing but their tattered combat jackets and they slowly congealed in their exposed positions. The vehicles broke down repeatedly and the men would stand around on the frozen snow while the damage was being repaired. With each halt, the Russians passed the vodka bottle around. They showed an amazing tolerance to this vile liquid, one drink of which was enough to incapacitate the Americans, and when they finally pulled into Bromberg, the Third Auxers could neither walk nor talk. They decided to thaw out at the hospital.

The hospital was run by Poles and Russians. Military and civilian casualties were thrown together without the slightest regard for segregation or priority. The crowding was unbelievable. As soon as news got around that three American doctors had arrived, there was a great clamor for their services and the Third Auxers went to work in the operating room. For the time being, Moscow was in the background.

A week later, the front to the north of the city suddenly flared. On an especially cold and snowy night, the Germans lashed out in a counterattack to relieve the beleaguered city of Danzig. Bromberg was only lightly held by the Russians and before anybody knew what was happening, the city

was enveloped. The Third Auxers viewed the situation with alarm.

"Let's get out of here," said Crandall. "This battle is coming close to home."

"What a night to start traveling," said Rodda.

"If we wait till morning, we'll travel as guests of the Krauts. Let's see if we can find a truck."

On the plaza in front of the hospital, a Russian truck driver was firing up his vehicle.

"Wait a minute, tovarich! How would you like to take us along?" Without waiting for an answer, the Third Auxers jumped on. They had learned to let actions speak.

The vehicle lumbered on. Across the deserted plaza, past some barricades, down a steep hill to the bridge across the Vistula. It was pitch black. German battalions were already in the city and the driver had to detour several times before he reached the bridge. He made it. On the other side was Torun.

The Russians were gathering for a stand along the river. Torun was alive with them. The hour was late and the temperature below freezing. The Third Auxers had little stomach for an all-night drive. They got off.

"It looks to me as if we have jumped from the frying pan into the fire," said Rodda.

"Fire? Where do you see a fire?" said Van Gorder, his teeth chattering. "I want to warm up."

A figure loomed out of the darkness. It was a Polish constable. Van Gorder tried to talk to the man. His German was lost on the Pole. In the midst of this one-way conversation, a Russian patrol appeared on the scene. The Polish constable went into a long explanation, the upshot of which was that the Americans were marched off to jail. It was obvious that they were suspected of being spies.

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At the jail, an MP lieutenant made a half-hearted attempt at interrogation. Van Gorder did his best but his words fell on deaf ears. Finally the lieutenant said something that sounded like: "Throw these Fascists in jail and hang them tomorrow."

"But we have a pass!" remonstrated Van Gorder and he reached for his bill fold.

The lieutenant looked at the paper. Scornfully, he shrugged his shoulders: "Nitchewo." A pass from Schubin meant nothing to him.

The Torun jail was full of petty criminals, black marketeers, Polish collaborators, Nazi spies, and the flotsam of a defeated nation, all thrown together in one large bull pen with no heat, no ventilation, and no light. The atmosphere was heavy but the Third Auxers were too much preoccupied to notice it. They were exhausted and they fell asleep immediately.

The next day did not bring the hangman's noose. It brought nothing, not even food. Evidently, the Russians did not believe in feeding their prisoners. At every opportunity, the Third Auxers harangued the guard, pouring all their indignation into that one magic word *Amerikanski!* Finally, it worked. The guard unlocked the door, put handcuffs on the Americans, and led them before yet another MP lieutenant. This man was intelligent enough to realize that he was dealing with escaped prisoners of war but did not make the slightest attempt to straighten their path. All he did was to exhort the men that they must leave Torun immediately on penalty of being locked up again! The plight of the Third Auxers was apparently unsolvable. Nobody wanted them, nobody directed them, and nobody gave them comfort. They were outcasts.

The battle for Bromberg ended in a rout for the Germans. Russian reinforcements turned the scales two days after the attack had started. But the Third Auxers did not

go back. They decided to make another try for Moscow and wangled a ride on a truck that seemed to be going in the right direction. The weather suddenly turned mild. The road became a quagmire. Axle-deep potholes stalled the vehicle repeatedly. At one point the road disappeared into a small river and the men were stranded for several hours with water up to their waists. The driver met all obstacles with a grandiloquent "Nitchewo" and did not exhibit the slightest concern. It was obvious that he would never reach the next town, let alone Moscow.

"I take a dim view of this," said Rodda. "Why don't we get off and hop a freight? I think I can see railroad tracks."

"Sure," said Van Gorder. "And look! There's a station."

The "station" was nothing more than a shack. In the United States, it would not even have sheltered a menagerie of cats and dogs, but in Poland it held out a beckoning hand. The Third Auxers got off. They walked along the tracks and found a station master who could speak a little German. An eastbound train was due within an hour, he said. Would there be room? Trains for Moscow had plenty of room.

At the appointed hour, an incredibly dirty and decrepit train hove into view. It stopped. The Third Auxers jumped on. They reconnoitered. The train was made up of empty cattle cars and their only traveling companion was a Russian lieutenant who flashed a big smile and several broken teeth.

"Where are we going, tovarich?"

"Moskva."

"We are going with you."

"Nitchewo."

The train rumbled on. Never doing more than fifteen miles an hour, it made innumerable wayside stops for no observable purpose whatever. The Russian lieutenant spent his time brewing tea and eating black bread which he shared generously with the Amer-

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icans. At intervals he would point to some miserable hovels in the distance and announce that this was Czczuczyn or Przasnysz or whatever the local geography called for. He made his headquarters in a car that had the Russian equivalent of a Sibley stove and he was a past master at finding firewood along the right of way. The Third Auxers dried out. This was not a bad deal at all.

The train entered the Pinsk marshes and meandered towards Minsk. At Bialystok the rails were washed out and there was a long delay. The Third Auxers wandered through the town in search of food. All they could find was more black bread. They returned to their cattle car. It was home to them.

At Negoreloe, Soviet police boarded the train. They questioned the Russian lieutenant at length and then concentrated on the Third Auxers. And they were very hard to please. Even the pass from the commissar at Schubin made no impression on them. In vain, the Third Auxers explained that they were going to Moscow. In Russia, nobody went to Moscow except high officials. "But we are high officials," countered Crandall. "We are representatives of the famous 101st Airborne Division and we want to confer an honorary membership on Stalin." The police seemed baffled. They telephoned for instructions. From Minsk to Pinsk the answer was the same: "Tell these insolent Americans to take the next train to Warsaw." Moscow was simply out of the question.

The Third Auxers bedded down in the Negoreloe railroad station under the watchful eye of the police. They were now in Russia. The town was bleak and dismal. The country was drab and treeless. The people were gruff and hostile. Van Gorder summed the situation up: "If this is Russia, let's go back to Poland."

The next day a train to Warsaw rolled

into the station. It was jammed. The Third Auxers thumbed their noses at the Negoreloe police and got on. At Brest Litofsk, the train switched south and the Americans transferred to another train. This one took them to within twenty miles of their goal. They walked in.

Warsaw had ceased to exist. The destruction was fearsome. Not a house had escaped. This was a city of the dead. The Third Auxers directed their steps to Praga, a suburb on the east bank of the Vistula. At the Praga hospital they were received with open arms. They were the first American doctors to appear in Warsaw and they were like a breath of fresh air to the Poles who had suffered under five years of Nazi suppression and were now suffering even worse at the hands of the Russians. These men were hungry for first-hand reports of medical progress.

When Warsaw fell in 1939 the Nazis immediately dissolved the medical school and liquidated the professors. Desperately, the Poles took matters in their own hands. They started an underground medical school. Students met at the homes of their teachers and pursued their work with such alacrity that over two hundred of them were graduated during the five years of the occupation. When the Russian siege started in the fall of 1944 and casualties eventually reached the half-million mark, it was these young men and women who were the first line of medical defense.

Their medical education made up in enthusiasm for what it lacked in quality. No wonder that the Third Auxers were quickly surrounded by a crowd of eager doctors whose first question was: "Is it true that there is a new wonder drug, penicillin?" The questions came so fast and furious that Crandall decided to put on a series of seminars. These seminars were attended not only by the graduates of the Warsaw medical

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school but also by the entire student body so that the total attendance ran into the hundreds. The Third Auxers discussed the use of penicillin, the technique of new operations, the plaster-cast treatment of wounds, and a host of other subjects that were of intense interest to men who had been cut off from medical progress for five long years. The Poles listened with rapt attention.

Gradually, more and more liberated prisoners made their way to Warsaw. The Russians built a huge stockade where they treated their Allies a shade worse, if possible, than they treated their German prisoners. The food was vile, the quarters offensive, the atmosphere hostile. The Third Auxers visited this stockade several times in the hope of being able to do something for their fellows from Schubin but it was love's labor lost. The Russians just shrugged their shoulders.

The situation in Praga deteriorated. Although the Poles did everything within their power to make life bearable for the Third Auxers, they could not shield their friends from the attention of the Russians. The hospital was a center of Polish patriots and as such was full of Russian counterintelligence men. It became dangerous for the Americans to be so closely associated with underground activities.

"We've got to get out of here," said Crandall. "If we don't, we'll wind up in that forsaken stockade in Warsaw."

"Where can we go?" asked Van Gorder. "We've tried Moscow and we can't make any headway towards Berlin."

"The only route open is to the south," countered Crandall. "Are you with me?"

"Roger."

When the Poles heard that the Americans were leaving they decided to put on a farewell banquet. Crandall tried to discourage the idea because he knew that the food situation was but little better than it had been

under the Nazis. People were still gnawing on bones from dead horses. How was it possible to put on a banquet under such circumstances? But the Poles insisted and on the evening of the dinner hundreds of doctors gathered in the main assembly hall. Those who came to pay their respects ate a meal of soup and black bread. In the middle of this repast, one fried egg was placed before the Third Auxers. It was the only egg in all of Warsaw! The Americans were touched. They expressed their appreciation with tears in their eyes and promised that they would return as soon as possible with a supply of penicillin. To this day they regret that they could never make good on their promise.

On 15 March they started anew. They walked to the outskirts of Praga and thumbed a ride on a huge truck that was carrying a load of demobbed Polish soldiers to their hometown of Lublin. The Poles were as excited as children. They had salvaged a barrel of beer and were gloriously inebriated long before the truck reached Lublin. In the general wassail, all national differences were forgotten and the Third Auxers kept their end up with innumerable long drafts of beer. For the first time in their captivity, they saw laughing, merry people.

All Lublin participated in the celebrations. The returning heroes made a triumphant tour of the city which many of them had not seen since the fall of Poland in 1939. There was not only the official welcome but also any number of impromptu reunions on the street, each one with its quota of toasts and embraces. Lublin took a holiday. The Americans basked in the limelight.

It was in the midst of these festivities that Crandall heard of a train that was carrying Allied prisoners of war to the Black Sea port of Odessa. The train had pulled into Lublin earlier in the day and was still in the station. The Third Auxers investigated. They asked

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to see the train commander, a painfully correct British major who, even at this late date, insisted on carrying out his orders. His orders said that the train was reserved for the British. The Americans could go to hell. Crandall saw red. "Major," he said, "I hate to do this to you but if we don't get on this train, the War Office is going to hear about it." The major backtracked. The Third Auxers got on.

The trek to Odessa took a full week, a full week of black bread, freezing temperatures, and standing room only. During this week, the landscape changed from the frozen plains of Poland to the rainswept fields of Bessarabia. At every stop, dour-faced Russian guards with fixed bayonets paced the platform to keep the citizens of the U.S.S.R. from being contaminated with the soldiers of the democracies. "You'd think that we were going to Siberia," said Rodda. "Well, they can have their country. I never want to see it again."

At Odessa, the prisoners were transferred to a British ship which sailed through the Bosporus into the Mediterranean. It made brief stops at Istanbul and Malta and it docked at Marseille one week after leaving Odessa. Here, the British soldiers disembarked and the Americans continued on the same boat to Naples where they arrived on 2 April. The end of their odyssey was in sight.

The Third Auxers requested to be reassigned to the 101st Airborne but this request was refused. Crandall and Rodda flew back to the States. Van Gorder followed by boat. For Team No. 19 the war was over. But, although these men were never to work together again, their joint achievement during the six brief months of 1944 is enough to earn them a permanent place of fame in the annals of airborne medical service. They were pioneers. They were men without fear. They braved great dangers to help their fellows. The Third Aux salutes them.

The rest of the story of the Bulge can be told in a few words. As early as the second day, the Allied High Command ordered a shift in the disposition of the troops. First Army stopped operations at the Roer and concentrated on the northern shoulder of the salient. Third Army stopped operations at the Saar and concentrated on the southern shoulder. The gallant defense of St. Vith and Bastogne took the sting out of the German drive. Unable to break these strong points, the Germans by-passed them, only to bog down for lack of communications. On 24 December German tanks were within sight of the Meuse at Dinant. It was a short-lived glimpse. On the next day, the 2nd Armored Division wiped out the German spearhead. The Bulge stopped bulging.

By 29 December the Germans were on the defensive. They began a general withdrawal. On 3 January, the Americans began a two-pronged offensive, designed to bite into the base of the Bulge. First Army drove towards Houffalize from the north, Third Army from the south. In ten days of savage fight-



Isobel Johnson marries Frank Hickory.

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ing under the most difficult conditions yet experienced, these two armies squeezed the life blood out of the fifth Panzer Army. The junction took place at a point near Houffalize on 14 January but not before the Germans had extricated most of their troops. On 23 January, the Americans re-entered St. Vith and a few days later the front ran again approximately as it did on that fateful 16 December.

Third Aux teams led a hard life during these weeks. In the beginning, the situation was so confused that field hospitals ceased to operate altogether. Everybody was running for his life. Shortly after the first of the year, a line of evacuation was re-established but the severe winter weather wrought havoc everywhere. The period from the middle of December till the end of January marked a low point for the Third Aux, not only in performance but in morale. The miserable quarters, the appalling weather, the grim isolation, the military reverses, and the uncertainty about the captured teams, all this contributed towards making Third Auxers sick at heart. They did not perk up until the first breath of spring.

Nevertheless, romance flourished. On 26 January, Isobel Johnson married Frank



Maribel Dorton marries John Auld. Picture taken at the reception at Third Aux Headquarters.

Hickory of the 2nd Armored in an impressive ceremony at the beautiful chateau Florzé. Isobel and Frank had met in Sicily, courted in England, battled red tape in France, and were married with full pomp and circumstance in Belgium. They have lived happily ever after.

The second wedding was that of Maribel Dorton and John Auld of the 20th Engineers. This romance too blossomed in Sicily and stood the test of Army slow-down regulations. The wedding was solemnized at the English Episcopal Church in Spa on 2 February. Third Auxers showed up in great numbers, after having received the following invitations:

C O N F I D E N T I A L	
<i>Hdqs to combine forces</i>	
<i>Office of License Comdr</i>	
YOU/me	
APO 230 U. S. Army	
January 1945	
1. Operations	"Cupid"
2. Codeword	I do
3. Forces involved	John G. Auld Maribel E. Dorton
4. Objective	To tie the knot
5. Avenue of approach	The middle aisle
6. Line of departure	Spa, Belgium
7. H-hour	1030 2 Feb
8. Supporting forces	You
9. The enemy	None
10. Equipment required	Old shoe 'n rice
11. Password	Rolling—Pin
12. Time involved	Forever

By order of Gen Mutual A. Greement  
(signed) : Twoas Cheapasone, Jr  
Official: Colonel, U. S. Army

Matt Trimony  
General, Allied Forces

Dist: Universal

After the war, the Auld-Dorton Allied Force established headquarters in Homer City, Pennsylvania where it has operated with great success.



## Chapter XI



### The Last Lap

After the Bulge, First Army concentrated on the Roer dams, those same dams that had defied the Americans since October. The drive started on 2 February. The Germans put up a fierce resistance and opened the floodgates just before the Americans reached their objective. The river became a raging torrent and delayed the next offensive for a full two weeks.

The Roer crossings took place on 23 February in the vicinity of Duren. After several days of heavy fighting, resistance crumbled and by 27 February a complete breakthrough had been achieved. Armored spearheads raced across the plain of Cologne and reached the Rhine on 4 March. Cologne fell on 7 March. On the same day, an advanced patrol of the 9th Armored Division seized the Remagen railroad bridge and troops started pouring across the river. First and Third Army joined hands north of Coblenz. The west bank of the Rhine was securely in American hands.

During March, Third Auxers saw Germany beyond the Siegfried Line and what they saw was a very neat, very clean, and very beautiful country. For the first time in months, the weather took a turn for the better and the Rhine valley revealed itself in all its legendary charm and riches. From Cologne in the north to Coblenz in the south, the country was dotted with picturesque villages, well-tilled fields, and terraced vineyards. Especially vineyards. This

was the center of the Rhine wine country where every village had its own cooperative. Third Auxers had a nose for the juicy spots, although they sometimes came off second best. Few will forget Ahrweiler.

At Ahrweiler the men liberated a virtually intact winery. Thousands of barrels with the choicest brands were stored in subterranean vaults. On the evening before the Rhine crossing, the 13th Field Hospital staged a party at which wine was the main ingredient. Unfortunately, the truck drivers picked up the wrong barrels. Instead of bringing the properly ripened product, they delivered a barrel of green wine. The stuff was just so much poison. It acted as an emetic, aperient, and excitant. Before the party was many hours old, the merry-makers ran in all directions, some sick, some fluxed, some wild! Several thought that they had been poisoned and started hunting Jeries in the dead of night. Others simply collapsed in their tents. The next morning, the ground was dotted with patches of evil-smelling, wine-colored vomitus. Long lines formed at the latrines. It was a sad aftermath.

The first hospital across the river was the 51st Field Hospital which set up at Unkel on 14 March. A few days later, the 13th Field Hospital followed. It went to Linz, a famous name in the Rhineland. Linz had the greatest champagne stores in the world when the Third Auxers moved in. When they

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moved out, the stores were considerably depleted and the Third Aux had temporarily changed its name to Third Auxiliary Drinking Group. Not all the champagne found its way into Third Auxers' stomachs, however. After the first few days, the civil administrator arrived. He was a righteous man and immediately declared the vaults out of bounds. But who was to clean up the mess? Third Auxers volunteered. They arrived with mops and buckets and, since the city water supply was out of commission, they scrubbed the floor with the same champagne that sold for eighty-four shillings a bottle in London. It was the most enthusiastic clean-up detail in the history of the Third Aux.

The Germans made a desperate effort to contain the rapidly expanding beachhead across the Rhine. They kept their guns

trained on the Ludendorff bridge for many days and they even sent a suicide squad down the river to blow it up. It was to no avail. The bridge did collapse on 17 March but by this time four pontoon bridges were already in operation and the flow of men and materiel continued without serious interruption. In reality, the fate of the German Army had been sealed west of the Rhine. The losses could not be replaced. The troops that had been salvaged were second-string and they were stretched to the breaking point along the 350-mile front. Von Rundstedt was replaced with Kesselring but the greatest military genius in the world could not have retrieved the situation.

First Army seized the day of the mass-crossings for a new drive towards the east. Giessen and Marburg were captured on 28 March. Next, the 3rd Armored sliced



Brand, Germany, just before the Roer crossings.

Brand, Germany 12-54

## THE LAST LAP

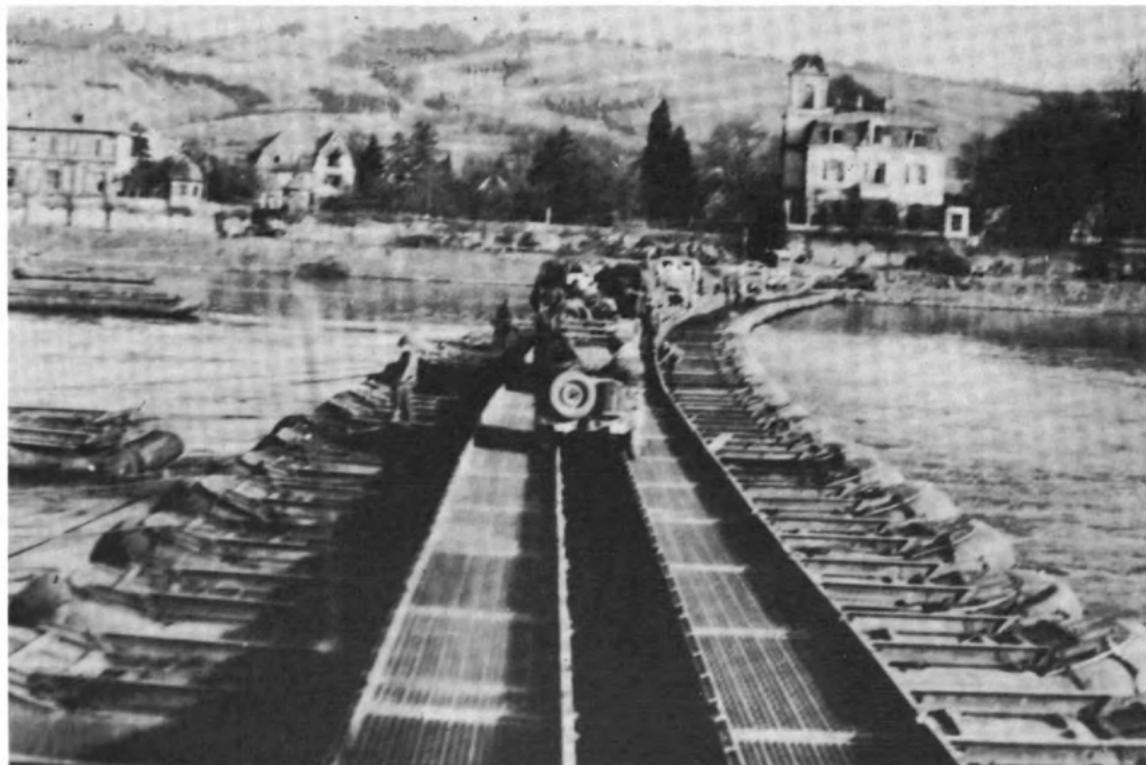
through fifty miles of enemy territory and sealed the southern boundary of the Ruhr pocket. Simultaneously, Ninth Army expanded along the northern boundary. The two armies met at Lippstadt on 1 April and completed the encirclement. This was the crowning disaster for the Germans. Out of approximately sixty divisions on the western front, twenty-one were trapped! The yield was even greater than at Stalingrad, hitherto the largest operation of its kind. The Ruhr pocket was rapidly liquidated. On 11 April, Essen fell. Three days later, the pocket was split in two by the junction of American spearheads at Hagen. On 19 April, all resistance ceased.

During the battle for the Ruhr, field hospitals were still able to function according to the accepted formula. Third Auxers worked a little, looked around a little, and

looted a little. Looting in those days did not imply any great crime. Rather, it was the natural result of the circumstances. The methods used were almost genteel compared with the standard operating procedure of the Nazis during their heyday.

Field hospitals usually arrived in town at a time when the combat troops had already left, but before the advent of the civil administrator. During this interim, Germans who wanted to stay out of trouble surrendered all their contraband possessions to the burgomaster who impounded the articles at the city hall. With his well-known nose for such things, a Third Auxer could usually smell out the cache. If he did not find at least one good camera or binocular, it was just a matter of waiting until he got to the next town.

At Berleburg Third Auxers did not even



The 51st Field Hospital crosses the Rhine.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

have to look. The hoard was practically thrown at them. Berleburg was the family home of the Prince of Wittgenstein, a nobleman of ancient lineage. The prince took great pride in a truly marvelous collection of firearms which he had gathered from all parts of the world. Knowing the American weakness for items of that sort, he had buried the guns on his estate and posted a crude sign at the gate:

### OFF LIMITS TO SOLDATEN

The peculiar mixture of English and German aroused Zeiders' curiosity. He decided to have a look. No sooner had he entered the grounds than a Polish slave laborer hastened towards him with the information that a great treasure lay buried nearby. Zeiders had visions of the crown jewels and started back to town to tell the MP's about it. He was overtaken by the prince himself who had witnessed the conversation between the laborer and the American from afar. The prince knew that the hiding of firearms was a capital offense. To clear himself be-

forehand, he told Zeiders a cock-and-bull story to the effect that his gardener had buried the guns without consulting anybody. Zeiders said: "We'll see."

The MP's set out to unearth the treasure. They found no crown jewels but the guns were enough to make anybody's mouth water. The collection was undoubtedly one of the most valuable in the world. The prince was biting his lips. This looked bad for him. Under martial law, he could have been shot on the spot. American justice took a different course. After the Third Auxers had helped themselves to the guns, the MP lieutenant turned to Zeiders:

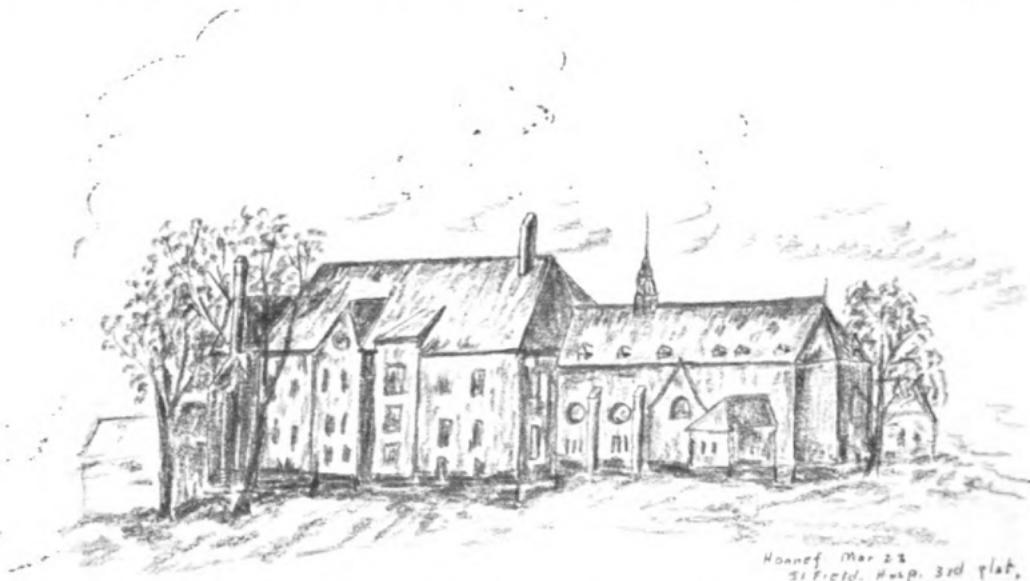
"You are the ranking officer here, Major. What do you want to do with the prince?"

"I'll be darned if I know," said Zeiders. "Can't we just give him a good scare?"

"Sure. Let's put him on the hood of the jeep and bounce him around for a while. That will teach him a lesson."

And that was all that was done.

The Ruhr pocket had carried First Army



Schoolhouse at Honnef, site of the 51st Field Hospital.



Map taken by First Army from 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945.



## THE LAST LAP

as far east as Paderborn on 1 April. The next three weeks were spent mainly in the cleaning up of the pocket. With this accomplished, the troops again faced east. They cut a swath thirty to fifty miles wide pointing towards Leipzig. The pattern repeated itself over and over. Armored columns probed for soft spots and the infantry disposed of the by-passed centers. Leipzig fell on 18 April. The Harz mountains yielded another great batch of prisoners. First Army coasted to a stop on the Elbe-Mulde line and waited for the Russians. The Junction took place at Torgau on 25 April.

Third Auxers coasted too. They still did a little work but the day of the field hospital was gone. Now came a time for individual exploration. The trip to Karlsbad will always rank as typical of Third Aux enterprise.

Early in May, the teams of Meyers and Hurwitz were camped with the 51st Field Hospital in Leipzig. They were ready for a little extracurricular excitement. Smazal had an uncle who was chief of police in Prague. What was more natural than to go to Prague and deliver Third Aux greetings to the chief? Nobody could take exception to that.

The party consisted of Meyers, Hurwitz, Black, Brown, and Smazal. They impressed a sleek Mercedes-Benz convertible, added a jeep-cum-trailer for the baggage, and drew up a tentative route. Their plan was to strike south as far as Prague and continue from there into the Tyrol. Two days before V-E Day, they took off.

The start could hardly have been more auspicious. The weather was beautiful, the road was superb, and the Mercedes was the last word in luxurious transportation. From Leipzig, the route lay straight south, through Alpinburg and Sweetgal and into the Erz

mountains. Far from any battlefield, this was peaceful country with sweeping views and colorful panoramas. At Schneeberg, the party stopped for lunch.

"Isn't this the place where everybody is supposed to die of cancer of the lung?" asked Brown.

"Maybe so," said Hurwitz. "But these people don't look very sickly to me." And he motioned towards a group of apple-cheeked youngsters who were moving in for their share of the K rations.

The road climbed past Eibenstock and Wilderthal and across the divide. Smazal looked at his watch. At this rate, they would be in Prague for supper. The Mercedes swooped down towards the Bohemian plateau, engine purring sweetly. All seemed well.

At Nejdek, they came upon a road block. It was manned by a 1st Division unit. Smazal stopped the car.

"What goes on, sergeant?"

"Sir, this is the front line. We have orders to stop all Americans and capture all Germans."

"Good. We are on a reconnaissance mission to Prague. Counterintelligence. You know."

"Yes, sir. But you are traveling at your own risk."

"Roger."

The Mercedes started up. The next town was Karlsbad. But if the Third Auxers expected to slip quietly through this famous resort, they had not counted on Czech exuberance.

Karlsbad on 6 May was a city on a volcano. The people knew that the Russians were approaching from the east and the Americans from the west. Only, they did not know who would get there first. Rumors were running wild and the mayor had made up two different reception committees to be

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

prepared for either contingency. His job was made more difficult by the presence in Karlsbad of thousands of civilian refugees and thousands of German soldiers who had converged there as a last resort. Vigilantes were stationed in strategic locations to report the first sign of approaching troops. Karlsbad was ready.

If there was any doubt about where Czech sympathies lay, this was quickly dispelled when the Third Aux Mercedes hove into view. Within one minute, everybody had heard the news: The Americans are here! The suspense was over and the reaction was terrific. Everybody who could walk poured out into the streets to welcome the liberators. Girls threw flowers. Men rushed forward, waving flags. A band struck up the national anthem. The reception committee went into a huddle. The mayor tried to make a speech. It was completely drowned out in the general bedlam. Karlsbad went wild. Even had the Third Auxers wanted to, they could not have silenced the demonstrations. They were completely overwhelmed.

"Who wants to go to Prague now?" said Brown. "It could not possibly be better than this place."

"Yes, but we are here under false colors," observed Meyers. "These people think that we are the American High Command instead of a bunch of broken-down docs. We are going to get into trouble."

"Hell with that noise," came Black. "We've fought a long war and we are entitled to a little of the glory. I vote we stay."

"Cut it out," said Hurwitz. "We haven't got a chance to get out of here. The people won't let us. Relax."

Hurwitz was right. Before the Third Auxers could do anything about it, they had been escorted to the Schoenbrunn Hotel, a magnificent hostelry where an entire floor

had been reserved for them. A beaming *maitre d'hôtel* showed them to their suite. A delegation of workers appeared. This was followed by the ranking German officer who wanted to make surrender negotiations. Then came a long line of prominent Karlsbad citizens to pay their respects. The Third Auxers never got a word in. There was no use rowing against the stream.

There was a knock at the door. It was a bellboy with an artistically inscribed card which read:

### HAIL TO THE AMERICANS

The city of Karlsbad welcomes its American liberators and invites them to attend a banquet in their honor at the Schoenbrunn Hotel on Sunday 6 May 1945 at seven o'clock.

Praise be the Lord

The Third Auxers looked at one another and started straightening their rumpled battle jackets. After all, they had to look their best.

The banquet was a glittering affair. It was attended by local dignitaries, government officials, leaders of the underground, the city council, and hundreds of others who wanted to jump on the band wagon. Women came in the colorful national costume. The Third Auxers were seated in the place of honor and were kept busy answering toasts without end. There were speeches, songs, music, and even a sumptuous ballet, put on by the members of the Czech Opera Company. The celebration rivaled that which had been put on for the first Third Auxers in Paris. Now, as then, the men kept going until they were limp with fatigue and hoarse from shouting. Gradually, the party broke up. Silence settled once more on the hotel corridors.

At five o'clock, the telephone jangled in Black's room. Painfully, he lifted the receiver. What he heard was no surprise to him.

## THE LAST LAP

"General Black! The Russians are here. There must be some mistake. Could you tell them to leave?"

"The Russians . . . ? Why, the im-  
posters! Tell them to wait. I'll take care of  
them in the morning."

Black hung up. This was no time to start haranguing Communists. Moreover, he had a terrific headache. Why did the Russians have to interfere with his sleep?

In the morning Third Auxers gathered in the dining room. The atmosphere was ominous. Nobody said a word. A tearful chef came in: "The Russians! They have stolen all my food. I am ruined!" The man collapsed.

The Third Auxers went out into the street. There was not a soul to be seen. This same city, which had poured its heart out only yesterday, now looked like a graveyard. It was unbelievable. Slowly, the men made their way towards the main square. The first Russian they saw was a dead one. He lay sprawled on the pavement, face down. An irate citizen had taken justice in his own hands.

Around the next corner came the noise of an engine. It sounded even worse than the explosions of the wood-burning vehicles of the German army. Presently, the conveyance came into view. It was a German Truppenwagen in indescribable condition. The tires were flat. The chassis was sprung. The cab was partly missing. The body had been trussed with baling wire to keep it from falling apart. The engine emitted great billows of smoke. Stranger yet were the occupants: a motley assemblage of vagabonds in all manner of dress and undress. The Third Auxers stood transfixed. "If that's the Russian Army, God help us," said Smazal.

The Truppenwagen halted. A great cheer arose. The vagabonds jumped out and rushed towards the Third Auxers.

"Americans! Good old Americans! Praise be the Lord. We're as good as home now."

Yes, it was true. These gaunt and disheveled creatures were American prisoners who had been liberated only a few hours earlier. They were Air Force men and they had been captive for over two years. The sight of the Third Auxers made them weep with joy.

There followed a scene that words cannot describe. The prisoners wanted to know everything at once. They danced and they cheered and they sang and some of them collapsed from sheer excitement. No wonder. They had not eaten for days. The Third Auxers gave them their K rations, told them where to find the 1st Division patrols, and sent them on their way. The incident had made them forget all about their predicament.

At the city hall, the truth was painfully evident. The corridors were filled with the same petitioners who had welcomed the Americans the day before. Only, this time they were depressed instead of elated. Fear and trepidation marked their faces. The Russians had been in Karlsbad just a few hours but already there was an atmosphere of anxiety and distrust.



Two towers of strength: Scoggins and Piasecki.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

The commanding general had installed himself in the mayor's office. He was an uncouth individual with a glass eye which he fixed savagely on the Third Auxers. On his right was his second-in-command and on his left the commissar. The conversation was carried on through an interpreter who had a very easy job because the answers were all monosyllables. The interview ran somewhat as follows:

"These are five American officers who are on a mission to Prague. Can they have a pass?"

"Nein!"

"Can they stay in Karlsbad to help with the evacuation of American prisoners?"

"Nein!"

"What did the General wish to do?"

"Heraus!" (Throw them out!)

Completely deflated, the Third Auxers went back to the hotel, gathered their belongings, and climbed into the Mercedes. This was a sad anticlimax to their triumphant entry. Slowly, the car got under way. On the outskirts a little girl threw a kiss in the direction of the departing Americans. Smazal swallowed hard. This was the country of his ancestors. He looked back:

"The Iron Curtain is ringing down."



Third Auxers meet the Russians. Black, the Chief of Police, the Division Commander, the Commissar, and Meyers.

The war was now rapidly drawing to a close. Hitler vanished on 30 April. The Russians completed their conquest of Berlin on 2 May. The next day, the Germans asked for surrender terms, still hoping to salvage something out of the ruins. Both the military clique and the Nazi party wanted to sidestep responsibility for the disaster that had befallen them. Each could envisage a situation in which it would be possible to blame the other for Germany's collapse. But the Allies were adamant. On 8 May in a schoolhouse at Rheims, the official instrument was signed. The war was over.

On 23 April, Third Aux Headquarters moved to Weimar. Weimar was once the center of German culture. Men like Goethe and Schiller, Liszt and Herder had made it their home and they had left their imprint. But in the second World War, Weimar became noted for an entirely different brand of Teutonism: the prison camp at Buchenwald. Here, in an enclosure originally built for 8,000, the Germans crowded 60,000 political prisoners and gradually exterminated them. Third Auxers saw with their own eyes how it had been done. It was a spectacle of stark misery, utter degradation, and grim death.

Shortly after this, the Third Aux lost its commanding officer once again: Colonel Crisler joined a special First Army task force that returned to the States to draw up plans for the invasion of Japan. For the better part of a year, he had worked unflaggingly at two jobs, each one enough to consume the entire energies of a less vigorous individual. Colonel Crisler was awarded the Legion of Merit for his work with the Third Aux. The citation read in part:

"Demonstrating great skill and sound judgment, Colonel Joseph A. Crisler capably supervised the activities of his auxiliary surgical group. His superior leadership was reflected in the exceptional work performed by his organization in First Army hospitals.

## THE LAST LAP

Colonel Crisler's extraordinary ability and careful attention to detail contributed directly to the saving of many lives, reflecting highest credit on himself and the military service."

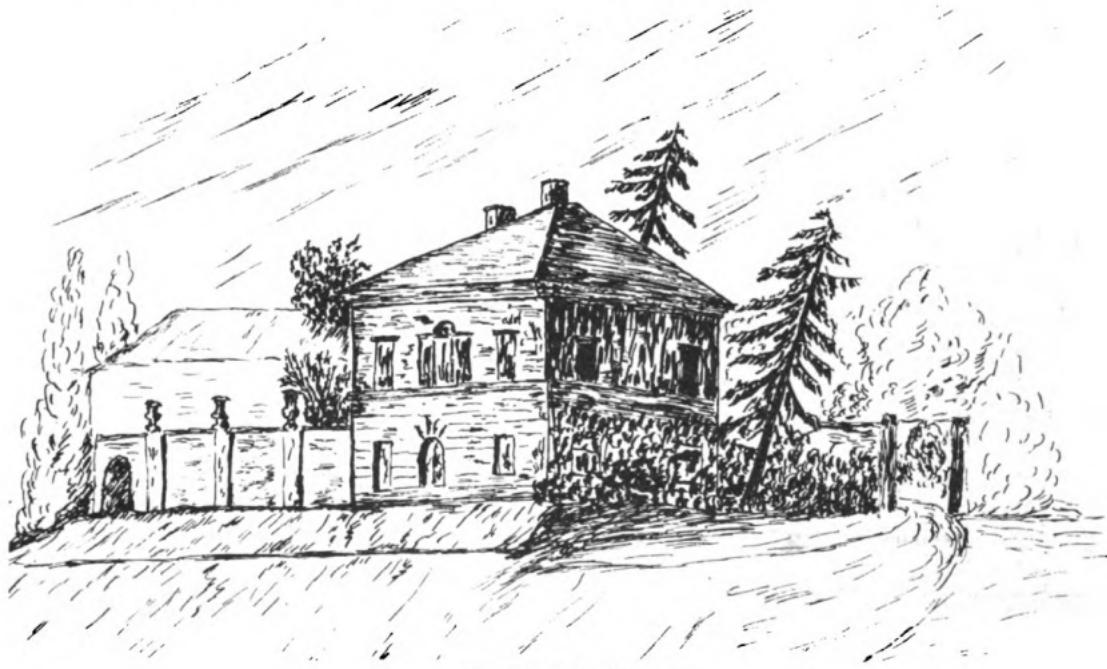
He left a niche that was hard to fill. Lieutenant Colonel Stephen J. Karpenski now stepped in. He had joined the Third Aux as executive officer in March and quickly gained everyone's confidence. It became his thankless task to put the Third Aux to bed.

One of Colonel Karpenski's first official acts was a pleasant one: he selected a batch of Third Auxers to be repatriated. High-pointers Nelson, Lamont, Roberts, Dickson, James, and Brown took their leave on 21 May amid great speculations of what the summer would bring for the rest of the Group. Redeployment turned out to be a process that was not completed until the fall.

Teams now began to converge on Weimar in ever increasing numbers and the Third

Aux presently outgrew its quarters in the requisitioned homes on the Belvederer Allee. Colonel Karpenski cast about. His eyes fell on a choice spot: a military post on the north side of the town. The buildings were of the permanent type with steam heat, modern conveniences, a well-appointed club, and all the things that the Third Auxers had done without for so long. The move took place on 23 May. Suddenly, the men found themselves in the lap of luxury. And they liked it. *And how!*

Once more, Third Auxers roamed the highways and byways. There was much to see. Within easy traveling distance of Weimar were such spots as the optical works of Jena, the china factories at Dresden, the beer breweries of Pilsen, the V-2 plants at Nordhausen, the historic Wartburg at Eisenach, the famous university of Göttingen, the religious shrine at Konnereuth, and many others. Those who could scrounge transportation for more than a day ventured into



Liszt home in Weimar.

FRONT LINE SURGEONS



This is what Third Auxers saw at Buchenwald.

## THE LAST LAP



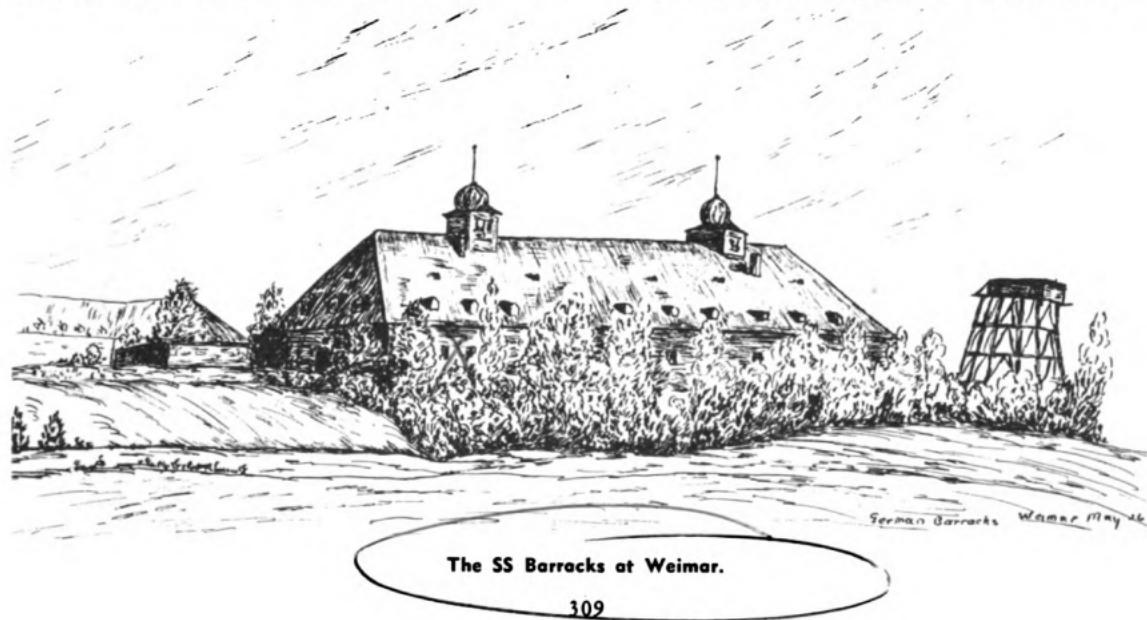
Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Karpenski, last commanding officer of the Third Aux.

southern Bavaria, the Tyrolean Alps, Berchtesgaden, and points south. Travel was a pleasure, courtesy of Adolph Hitler. The Autobahn was a magic carpet. It was not only a great engineering feat but also a great panoramic achievement. It gave the

traveler wings and showed him a bird's eye view of what was still the most beautiful country in the world. As one Third Auxer put it: "This is to live again."

On 7 June, the Third Aux celebrated its thirtieth month overseas with a lavish party. In reality, this party marked a number of milestones. It was three years since the Group was born. It was the anniversary of D Day. It was the last time the Group would be together in anything resembling its original form. And it was the end of an era. The Third Aux had accomplished its mission. Now was the time to sit back and let everybody share in the glory.

The festivities started with a cocktail party, continued with an elaborate dinner, and culminated in a *bal champetre* under the moonlit sky of a midsummer night. Major Coffin was master of ceremonies, Major Adams was in charge of arrangements, and Captain D'Allessandro was responsible for the decorations which revolved around the number 30. These men had done themselves proud. They had secured a number of civilian waiters, an excellent orchestra, an unlimited supply of liquor, and even



## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

a corps of professional entertainers. Such features would not seem spectacular to people who had never been away from home, but to Third Auxers, who had lived in mud and dust for thirty long months, they were fantastic. This was indeed the end of an era. Old-timers said: "Pinch me. It's too good to be true."

During the remaining weeks at Weimar, the Third Aux tried hard to get back to a garrison existence. The men were admonished to wear proper uniforms, to sign in and out, to police the quarters, and to watch all those long-forgotten punctilios. Profile examinations got under way, point scores were adjusted, specification numbers were juggled, redeployment was discussed from all angles, but when all was said and done, Third Auxers were still very much at sea. In the absence of definite information, many men asked for leave. It was the next best thing to going home. The requests were granted liberally and the Third Aux was

already well combed out when the imminent arrival of the Russians made a withdrawal to the west necessary.

The new site was Giessen, an hour's drive north of Frankfurt. The war had dealt harshly with Giessen. There were no buildings left that were large enough to house the Group and Colonel Karpenski decided to go back to tents. On 4 July, Headquarters made its thirtieth and last move.

For all its lack of urban facilities, the Giessen camp offered many compensations. It had lots of trees, lovely views, and a fine swimming pool. It also had plenty of field mice. As soon as the pick-and-shovel work was out of the way, Third Auxers again concentrated on leisurely living. They organized a ball team, they basked in the warm sunshine, and they built a colorful social center out of discarded parachutes. Many other units moved into the area. The nurses added the homey touch. Everybody relaxed.

Shortly after their arrival in Giessen,

**The Autobahn was not only an engineering feat but also a panoramic achievement.**



## THE LAST LAP

Third Auxers had good news. The Green Project got under way. Thousands of medical officers were flown home. The old guard dwindled rapidly.

And so it came to pass, one beautiful day in July, that the Third Aux passed out of existence. The death knell was a War Department order that changed the name to 896th Professional Services Group. Immediately plans got under way to provide a burial with full military honors.

The preparations were made in great secrecy. Ostensibly, there was to be simply a last get-together. But the crowd that gathered under the awnings of the patio and the billowing canvas of the dance floor soon realized the presence of a weird and sinister object. At first, they tried to ignore it. They laughed and joked, drank and danced, sang and frolicked just as they had at so many other Third Aux parties. And yet, underneath it was different. Gradually the lights went lower and lower. Gradually conversation changed from boisterous to hushed tones. Gradually the atmosphere reflected a certain tenseness, a certain uneasiness, a certain gloom. What was this darkened, shapeless mass that cast its death-like spell? Suddenly, a hidden spotlight brought its outlines into sharp relief. A catafalque!



The festivities started with a cocktail party.

At the stroke of twelve, the music died down. Instinctively, the dancers cleared the floor. Muted brass intoned Chopin's funeral march. A reverent and silent figure came forward. Taking up a position by the side of the catafalque, he bowed his head as in prayer. The crowd followed his example. There was a moment when everybody searched his soul. The Third Aux was being laid to rest. And every Third Auxer put to rest a part of himself.

Then, the silence was broken. In rich, sonorous tones, Brattesani recited the hymn that had been composed especially for the occasion by Ruth Maher. Speaking above the plaintive melody of "The Night Paddy Murphy Died," the man who had followed the fortunes of the Third Aux from infancy to old age delivered these impious lines:

### COMMEMORATION SONG

#### 1

'Twas the night the Third Aux died;  
The wake I'll ne'er forget  
The whole damn crowd was roaring drunk  
And some ain't sober yet.  
As long as the bottle was passed around  
The crowd they always stayed,  
And Third Depot brought their saxes  
along  
The music there to play.



Bal champetre.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

2

Now the old Third Aux sat in the corner  
Drinking out its grief.  
Along came the eight, nine, six  
The dirty rotten thief  
And out into the bar  
And a bottle of liquor he stole  
And put the liquor in the pool  
To keep the liquor cold.

3

Now the crowd grew mighty frisky  
And everyone jumped in,  
Then someone popped the champagne  
cork  
And made a lot of din.  
But the funniest thing I e'er did see  
That made me jump with fear  
When they took the ice right off the food  
And put it on the beer.

### CHORUS

That's how they showed  
Respect for the Third Aux;  
That's how they showed  
Their honor and their pride.  
They said it was a shame for poor old Aux,  
And they winked at one another.  
Everything in the whole club went  
The night the Third Aux died.

When the last strains had died away in the stillness of the night, Brattesani called on the pallbearers: Ronald Adams, Hollis Brainard, Clifford Graves, Ed Kirby, Rocco Tella, and Mark Williams. Next came the honor guard: Eleanor Bernick, Peggy Baker, Mary Fedor, Ruth Maher, Marie Miller, and Edna Parker. Finally, two honorary pallbearers took their places: Stephen Karpenski and Irene Doty. Once again the orchestra went into the funeral march. Slowly, the pallbearers lifted the casket. The cortège got under way. \*

Outside, on the gentle slope of a Taunus hill was a freshly dug grave. Torchbearers marked the site. The pallbearers lowered the casket. Colonel Karpenski came forward:

\* filled with empty whisky bottles <sup>312</sup>

"Fellows of the Third Aux. You have gathered here to bury an organization with a remarkable record. The Third Aux has been a severe taskmaster. It has carried us far from our homes. It has exposed us to great danger. It has called upon every ounce of our strength. But it has given us as much as it has taken. It has broadened our vision, steeled our nerves, opened our hearts, and matured our minds. The Third Aux was great because you made it great. Requiescat in pace."

At this point Captain Kirby spoke: "Let us inscribe the record with the names of those who stood by their patients in defiance of capture and death. We do not know the fate of the men who were lost in the Battle of the Bulge. Perhaps they have been saved. Perhaps they have been killed. But whatever has happened to them, the Third Aux is proud of them. We, who came through unscathed, pay homage to those who fell. Let us observe one minute of silence."



A tombstone was placed over the grave.

## THE LAST LAP

No one can record the thoughts that passed through the minds of those Third Auxers. Communal living had knitted them close. Pride of achievement was overshadowed by sorrow of parting. "Partir, c'est mourir un peu."

A tombstone was placed over the grave:

Here lie the remains of  
THE THIRD  
AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP  
Born—5 May 1942, Fort Sam Houston,  
Texas

Died—31 July 1945, Giessen, Germany

Age—3 years, 2 months, 26 days

Cause of death—Acute Nostalgia

Major Adams supplied the epitaph:

May you rest in peaceful slumber  
For we've got another number;  
Different too is now the name,  
God grant the T/O ain't the same.

The career of the 986th Professional Services Group was anticlimactic. One by one, officers, nurses, and men were transferred. The man who put the organization to bed was Lieutenant Hansen, Sensenbach's successor. Towards the end of September, when only a skeleton crew remained, he took his force to nearby Alsfeld. Here, on 12 October, the 896th was officially deactivated and all property disposed of. The only tangible remains of the Third Aux are the annual reports in the Surgeon General's Office and the payroll vouchers in the St. Louis Records Branch.

The piecemeal repatriation of the Third Aux was not without its tragi-comedy. The surrender of Japan brought havoc with redeployment schedules. Units that were already en route were recalled. Others were dissolved overnight. Staging areas were jammed. Individuals got lost. Almost every Third Auxer ran into delays, with the exception of those who went home on the Green Project. The stories of Tella and Campbell are typical.

Tella was an old-timer in the Third Aux but, like all anesthetists, he had been frozen in the rank of captain. This was a great injustice which Colonel Karpenski wanted to correct as soon as possible. In July, he transferred Tella to the Fifth Aux because the Fifth Aux was to go immediately to the Pacific by way of the United States. Tella could then be dropped off at home as a high-pointer. Tella was overjoyed. He whipped his baggage together, jumped in a jeep, and raced to Fifth Aux Headquarters.

"Captain Tella reporting, sir."

"Ah . . . . you are Tella. Good. We are taking off for Marseille in a few days."

"Marseille? I thought that you were going by way of the States!"

"Oh no! We go through the Suez Canal. Don't bother to unpack."

Tella went into a cold sweat. His jeep was still standing outside. He highballed back to Giessen. But Colonel Karpenski could do nothing. Technically, Tella was already a Fifth Auxer.

Tella rushed to Frankfurt. "Don't worry," he was told. "We'll transfer you to the 168th General in England. If you hurry you can just make it."

Tella took a plane but he missed the 168th by a few hours. Back to Frankfurt he went. The officer who had handled his orders had himself been transferred, but another good Samaritan had taken his place: "That's too bad, Captain. But we'll fix it. Go to the 191st General. That's in Paris. With your score, you'll be on your way in no time."

Tella dashed to Paris and reported to the adjutant at the 191st.

"When do we go home?"

"Home? We're not going home. This is an Army of Occupation outfit! We're leaving for Germany in a few days!"

Tella was near collapse. He was farther from home than ever. This would never do. But he had a good friend at ETOUSA Head-

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

quarters. Colonel Pisani would help him. Pisani listened sympathetically. "The 166th General is getting ready to sail from Le Havre," he said. "We'll write orders right away."

This sounded like the real thing. Alas, when Tella arrived in Le Havre, the 166th had just been instructed to go to Marseille. Marseille was at the wrong end of France. At this point, Tella decided to take matters in his own hands.

He returned to Paris, went to Green Project Headquarters, and said that he wanted to go home. He was on his way the next day.

Campbell fared even worse. With three year overseas, he had a point-score well in excess of the critical level. Accordingly, on 15 August he received orders to report to the 181st General Hospital at Mourmelon. His commanding officer greeted him warmly.

"Ah . . . . Major Campbell! You are our new chief of surgery. We need you. We are very busy just now."

"Busy? I thought this hospital was going home!"

"Oh no. We are going to the Pacific."

"But I have 120 points!"

"I'll get your orders changed. Meanwhile you go to work."

It took a full three weeks to get Campbell's orders changed. The new orders said that he was to go to the 50th General at Verdun. This hospital too was in full operation but at least it was supposed to go home soon. Campbell sweated out another two weeks.

The 50th General was instructed to report to Marseille. From Verdun to Marseille was a two-day trip in rickety, smelly, drafty coaches. Campbell took his punishment stoically. After all, there was a ship waiting in Marseille.

Far from it. At the staging area, the 50th

General was swallowed up in a sea of waiting troops. Interminably, the days dragged on. The camp was disgracefully crowded and the daily routine consisted of lining up at the mess, at the Px, and even at the latrines. Campbell estimates that he spent approximately three hours a day in line. "See the chaplain," was the standard answer to complaints.

Towards the end of September, a special order came out. The hospital would sail but all the officers were to return immediately to Paris! The officers went into open revolt. Another two days on the train? Unthinkable! They sent word to the Base Section Surgeon that they refused!

The Surgeon hurried over. He had a rough time of it but he finally convinced the recalcitrants that their return to Paris was simply to get them on the Green Project. There was a sigh of relief. Maybe they would get home after all.

The trip back to Paris was a repetition of the one to Marseille. Two days of standing in the breeze and munching K rations. The train arrived on 30 September, the last day of the Project. The officers hurried to ETOUSA.

"You are too late," they were told. "The only thing you can do is to go to Le Havre and sweat out your turn."

The men blew up. They threatened to send the story to the Paris Herald Tribune. They threatened to call the Inspector General. They threatened to send a telegram to every senator in Washington. And they got action. A General from Redeployment hurried over. He listened to the tale of woe. And he promised that the Green Project would be extended. The men said: "We won't believe it until we see the planes."

But the planes did keep flying and Campbell arrived home early in October. He still considers his last two months in the ETO as the greatest snafu of his career.



## Chapter XII



### Statistics

The Third Aux handled a grand total of about 25,000 casualties. This compares as follows with the other auxiliary surgical groups:

Second Auxiliary Surgical Group	22,000
Fourth Auxiliary Surgical Group	17,222
Fifth Auxiliary Surgical Group	15,000*
First Auxiliary Surgical Group *(estimated)	10,469

The work of the Third Aux breaks down as follows:

Tunisian campaign	943
Sicilian campaign	1,446
European campaign	<u>18,885</u>
	21,274

To this must be added the work done by the teams of Crandall and Horace G. Williams which were never able to report. Each team had approximately 1,000 cases. The specialty teams account for another 1,000 cases. Still another 1,000 cases were lost because of shifts in team leaders and various clerical errors.

For purposes of analysis, the cases that were done in Tunisia and Sicily should be excluded because in those two campaigns the field hospital did not yet function exclusively as a first-priority hospital. The remaining 18,885 case records can be used to give an accurate picture of the work of the Third Aux. They supply information on three points of interest:

- A. The type of installation in which the work was done.
- B. The kind of surgery that was done in these installations.
- C. The number of patients per team.

A. *The type of installation in which the work was done.*

Third Aux teams worked in four different types of installations:

1. The beach clearing stations.
2. The field hospitals.
3. The evacuation hospitals.
4. The field hospitals acting as evacuation hospitals.  
(This refers to the brief period in September 1944 when field hospitals were pressed into service to do both first-priority and second-priority work.)

The breakdown is as follows:

In the beach clearing stations	722 cases or 4%
In the field hospitals	7,829 cases or 41%
In the evacuation hospitals	8,069 cases or 43%
In the modified field hospitals	<u>2,265</u> cases or <u>12%</u>
	18,885 100%

It will be seen from these figures that the teams did almost the same number of cases in field hospitals as in evacuation hospitals. This might give the erroneous impression that the teams spent about as much time in one hospital as the other. Actually, they spent about 80 per cent of their time in field hospitals and 20 per cent in evacuation hospitals. The explanation is that the field hospital operations were almost entirely long, difficult jobs whereas many of the evacuation hospital operations were comparatively short and simple. The average time for a field hospital operation was two and a half hours, the average time for an evacuation hospital operation was much less. Consequently the 7,829 field hospital cases represent vastly more work and time than the 8,069 evacuation hospital cases.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

### *B. The kind of surgery.*

An over-all breakdown of the 18,885 cases shows the following:

Debridements, including compound fractures	13,389
Abdominal operations	3,414
Thoracic operations	2,018
Thoracoabdominal operations	824
Amputations and disarticulations	737
Genitourinary operations	167
Operations on the neck	104
Burns	120
	<hr/>
	20,775

Thus, 18,885 patients had 20,775 operations. The explanation is that many patients had multiple wounds.

The great difference between field hospital surgery and evacuation hospital surgery is well illustrated in the following figures.

In the field hospitals the teams did:

Abdominal cases	2,558	31%
Thoracic	1,595	20%
Thoracoabdominal cases	682	9%
Other cases	2,994	40%
	<hr/>	
	7,820	100%

In the evacuation hospitals, the teams did:

Abdominal cases	498	6%
Thoracic cases	232	3%
Thoracoabdominal cases	86	1%
Other cases	7,253	90%
	<hr/>	
	8,069	100%

When abdominal and chest cases are lumped together, they are seen to account for the work in the various installations as follows:

In the field hospitals	61%
In the beach clearing stations	30%
In the modified field hospitals	18%
In the evacuation hospitals	10%

These figures speak for themselves.

In the following table, the 18,885 patients are grouped together according to the nature of the surgery. This table was devised to record the number and kind of operations rather than the regional distribution of the wounds or the mortality figures. For instance, all debridements are lumped together, regardless of site. Another thing to be kept in mind is that the table records not only the number of operations but also the num-

ber of patients. One patient may have had several operations and appear under various headings. Consequently, the sum of the parts is larger than the whole (18,885 patients had 21,260 operations).

The figures are remarkably parallel with those given by the Second Auxiliary Surgical Group.

### COMPOSITE STATISTICS

#### *D-Day to V-E Day*

Total number of patients	18,885
CHEST	Number of patients
Closure of sucking wound	2,018
Thoracotomy	1,108
Exploration and aspiration	910
Suture of the lung	293
Removal of foreign body	354
Resection of lung tissue	263
Miscellaneous	39
	<hr/>
ABDOMEN	Number of patients
Closure of gastrointestinal perforations	3,414
Colostomy or exteriorization	1,437
Resection of small gut	1,160
Exploration only	597
Operations on the liver	548
Operations on the urinary bladder	504
Acute inflammatory conditions	288
Splenectomy	275
Nephrectomy	135
Operations on the biliary tract	87
Ileocolostomy	72
Operations on the ureter	57
	<hr/>
THORACOABDOMINAL	Number of patients
Through the thoracotomy approach	824
Suture of the diaphragm	541
Splenectomy	500
Closure of gastrointestinal perforations	108
Through the laparotomy approach	61
Suture of the diaphragm	348
Exploration only	178
Operations on abdominal organs	61
	<hr/>
GENITOURINARY	Number of patients
Nephrectomy	167
Repair of urethra	24
Miscellaneous	59
	<hr/>
NECK	Number of patients
Tracheotomy	116
Operations on pharynx or esophagus	104
	<hr/>
DEBRIDEMENTS	Number of patients
Major	54
Minor	45
	<hr/>
	13,389
	7,842
	8,033

## STATISTICS

### AMPUTATIONS & DISARTICULATIONS

	Number of patients
Knee and leg	433
Hip and thigh	183
Shoulder and upper arm	103
Elbow and forearm	102

### VASCULAR SURGERY

	Number of patients
Suture or anastomosis	107
Major ligations	362
Number of patients with sympathetic block	340

### BURNS

	Number of patients
MAJOR PLASTER APPLICATIONS	3,490

	Number of patients
Full leg	1,512
Hip spica	958
Plaster Velpeau	730
Shoulder spica	290
ANESTHESIA	17,137
Inhalation	6,367
With intubation	4,617
Without intubation	1,750
Intravenous	9,523
Block and local	994
Spinal	253
Bronchoscopic aspirations	1,306

Imposing as these figures are, they tell only part of the story. They list only operations. They do not list the huge amount of preoperative and postoperative work. For instance, in the section on thoracic wounds the patients are listed only if they had a thoracotomy or closure of a sucking wound. Nothing is said about those who were treated by aspiration, bronchoscopy, nerve block, and all the other resuscitative measures. If these were included, the total number of patients would be considerably larger than 18,885.

In the tabulation of anesthetics, the total number of patients is only 17,137. This is because certain teams were unable to supply information on this point. The small number of spinal anesthetics is of note. It indicates that most of the anesthetists considered the patients as poor risks, at least as far as abdominal casualties were concerned. The difficulties of operating on such casualties without the benefit of good relaxation are

well known. Under the conditions at the field hospital, each laparotomy was a tour de force.

The 1,306 bronchoscopic aspirations on a total of 2,018 chest patients are an interesting index of the type of work that went on in the field hospital. It has already been pointed out how most Third Aux anesthetists became expert bronchoscopists.

### C. Number of cases per team.

Altogether, 28 teams are listed here. They were not all operational at the same time however. Until December, there were 25 teams. Afterwards, the number dropped to 23. As a result of the reshuffle that occurred in December, 12 teams were altered or, in some cases, dropped. The other 16 were continuously active. Most of the low scores in the list are contributed by the 12 "discontinuous" teams.

Major Douw S. Meyers	1,229
Major James J. Whitsitt	1,225
Major Paul K. Maloney	1,215
Major Benjamin R. Reiter	1,043
Major James M. Higginbotham	882
Major Darrell A. Campbell	835
Major Robert M. Sutton	828
Major Allen M. Boyden	827
Major Mark H. Williams	798
Major Edwin M. Soderstrom	797
Major Francis M. Findlay	752
Major Marion E. Black	737
Major Wilson Weisel	729
Major Frank Wood	728
Major Glenn W. Zeiders	681
Major Clifford L. Graves	678
Major John B. Peyton	634
Major Louis W. Stoller	634
Major Silas A. Coffin	574
Major Philip F. Partington	565
Major Alfred Hurwitz	462
Major Robert M. Coffey	460
Major Reynold E. Church	430
Major Charles A. Serbst	347
Major Howard W. Brettell	313
Major Thomas J. Floyd Jr	292
Major John P. Sheldon	104
Major Ronald W. Adams	96
Major Horace G. Williams	?
Major Albert J. Crandall	?
Total	18,885

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

The average for the 16 "continuous" teams was 814.

When the teams are arranged according to the number of cases they did at the field hospitals, the list is as follows:

Major Douw S. Meyers	672
Major Benjamin R. Reiter	481
Major Mark H. Williams	424
Major Edwin M. Soderstrom	415
Major Reynold E. Church	413
Major Frank Wood	391
Major John B. Peyton	389
Major Darrell A. Campbell	388
Major Silas A. Coffin	360
Major Robert M. Sutton	343
Major Glenn W. Zeiders	337
Major Alfred Hurwitz	335
Major James J. Whitsitt	296
Major Allen M. Boyden	242
Major Louis W. Stoller	234
Major James M. Higginbotham	230
Major Robert M. Coffey	219
Major Charles A. Serbst	205
Major Francis M. Findlay	191
Major Howard W. Brettell	183
Major Clifford L. Graves	180
Major Thomas J. Floyd Jr	178
Major Marion E. Black	171
Major Philip F. Partington	165
Major Wilson Weisel	124
Major Paul K. Maloney	105
Major John P. Sheldon	104
Major Ronald W. Adams	54
Total	7,829

The average for the 16 "continuous" teams is 360.

When the teams are arranged according to the number of cases they did in evacuation hospitals, the list is as follows:

Major Paul K. Maloney	1,080
Major James J. Whitsitt	650
Major Marion E. Black	566
Major Allen M. Boyden	526
Major Clifford L. Graves	494
Major James M. Higginbotham	486
Major Wilson Weisel	405
Major Robert M. Sutton	384
Major Douw S. Meyers	334
Major Darrell A. Campbell	331
Major Francis M. Findlay	318

Major Mark H. Williams	310
Major Frank Wood	304
Major Robert M. Coffey	241
Major John B. Peyton	237
Major Louis W. Stoller	231
Major Edwin M. Soderstrom	217
Major Philip F. Partington	204
Major Silas A. Coffin	156
Major Benjamin R. Reiter	141
Major Thomas F. Floyd Jr	114
Major Alfred Hurwitz	107
Major Glenn W. Zeiders	84
Major Howard W. Brettell	57
Major Charles A. Serbst	50
Major Ronald W. Adams	42
Major Reynold E. Church	0
Major John P. Sheldon	0
Total	8,069

The average for the 16 "continuous" teams is 316.

### TEAM-SCORE BY TYPE OF CASE

	<i>Abdominal</i> <i>cases</i>	<i>Chest</i> <i>cases</i>	<i>Thoracoabd</i> <i>cases</i>	
Meyers	267	169	Meyers	71
Reiter	207	130	Reiter	57
Boyden	186	125	Williams	51
Williams	175	122	Sutton	47
Sutton	170	121	Campbell	45
Campbell	168	107	Boyden	39
Soderstrom	161	103	Church	36
Zeiders	154	89	Wood	35
Coffin	151	88	Graves	34
Whitsitt	146	80	Whitsitt	33
Peyton	138	Higginbotham	Findlay	32
Church	116	80	Black	32
Hurwitz	113	79	Partington	29
Wood	107	76	Higginbotham	29
Findlay	104	62		
Higginbotham	102	56	Zeiders	28
		Peyton	Floyd	28
Black	101	54	Stoller	28
Maloney	100	48	Soderstrom	26
Weisel	98	46	Coffin	21
Stoller	97	45	Hurwitz	19
Partington	96	45	Maloney	19
Coffey	91	42	Peyton	18
Serbst	87	41	Serbst	16
Brettell	78	40	Brettell	15
Floyd	76	38	Weisel	11
Graves	63	36	Sheldon	10
Sheldon	34	27	Coffey	9
Adams	18	12	Adams	6
Total	3,414	2,017	824	

## STATISTICS

The average record for the 16 "continuous" teams is:

Number of abdominal cases	163
Number of chest cases	89
Number of thoracoabdominals	36
Number of other cases	526
Total	814

### SPECIALIST TEAMS NEUROSURGICAL

There were two teams in the European campaign. Team No. 1 was headed by Major Walter G. Haynes until January 1945 and then by Major Fred W. Geib. Team No. 2 was headed by Captain Donald D. Matsen. Practically all the work was done at the evacuation hospitals. The figures are as follows:

	Pen wounds	Comp skull of the brain	Fractures	Laminectomies
Team No. 1	344	127	76	
Team No. 2	192	68	23	

### MAXILLOFACIAL

During the first six months of the European campaign the Group functioned mainly with one team. This was headed alternately by Major Jacob J. Longacre and Captain George A. Friedman. In December 1944, a second team took the field under Major George W. McLoughlin.

Maxillofacial cases are difficult to list categorically because no two of them are alike. Suffice it to say that Team No. 1 handled 572 cases and Team No. 2 166. Practically all the work was done at evacuation hospitals.

### X-RAY

The x-ray teams functioned at first with evacuation hospitals and later with the 91st Gas-Treatment Battalion. They were headed by Captain Robbins, Captain Howard G. Bayley and Captain Donald Linck.

The figures are as follows:

	No. of Patients	No. of Exams	No. of Films	No. of Op. days
Team No. 1	7,775	9,345	18,080	261
Team No. 2	3,156	3,910	5,093	252
Team No. 3	3,773	6,010	9,641	160

### DENTAL PROSTHETIC

There were three dental prosthetic teams under Major John R. Krampert, Major John B. Hemminger, and Major George A. Hutter. The teams functioned collectively as a dental clinic under the jurisdiction of the Army Dental Surgeon. The Third Auxiliary Surgical Group had administrative but not professional control. Therefore a statistical summary is omitted.





## Chapter XIII



### The Other Auxiliary Surgical Groups

There were five auxiliary surgical groups. All went to Europe; none to the Pacific.

Once committed, the units were assigned as follows:

First Aux—Communications zone in France, Fifteenth Army in Germany.

Second Aux—II Corps in Tunisia and Sicily, Fifth Army in Italy, Seventh Army in France and Germany.

Third Aux—II Corps in Tunisia and Sicily, First Army in France, Belgium, and Germany.

Fourth Aux—Third Army in France and Germany.

Fifth Aux—Ninth Army in Holland and Germany.

Since all these groups had much to do with front line surgery, a little more will be said about each of them.

#### THE FIRST AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP

The First Aux was activated on 20 December 1942 at Fort Sam Houston, three weeks after the Third Aux left that post. It was under the command of Colonel Clinton S. Lyter.

The Group arrived in England on 25 September 1943 and was assigned to Services of Supply. It was not until the very end of the war in Europe that the First Aux was assigned to a field army. The Group did send a detachment of eight teams to the Third Aux soon after D Day in Normandy and these teams remained under Third Aux control during most of the campaign. The First Aux sent similar detachments to the other auxiliary surgical groups. In addition, three teams were attached to XVIII Airborne Corps for Operation Market. One team was attached to the 17th Airborne Division for the cross-Rhine operation.

Headquarters remained in England until 3 November 1944 and then moved to Paris. The First Aux remained a Communications Zone unit until 18 April 1945 when it was assigned to Fifteenth Army.

The Group did not tabulate its work during 1944. From 1 January 1945 to 12 June 1945, the teams reported the following figures:

Abdominal cases	1,217
Thoracic cases	701
Thoracoabdominal cases	332
Debridements	4,353
Cranial cases	366
Maxillofacial cases	276
Miscellaneous cases	3,217
Total	10,469

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

### THE SECOND AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP

The Second Aux was activated on 10 April 1942 at Lawson General Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. It was under the command of Colonel James H. Forsee.

The Group went overseas in two detachments and a main body.

The first detachment was made up of two general surgical teams, one shock team, and one orthopedic team. These teams sailed from New York on 25 September 1942, arrived in Ireland on 4 October, left Ireland on 24 October, and landed at Surkouf near Oran on 11 November. The teams eventually proceeded to Tunisia where they operated alongside the Third Aux teams. Their experiences have already been related.

The second detachment was made up of eight general surgical teams, three orthopedic teams, and three shock teams. These teams sailed from New York on 2 November 1942 and arrived at Casablanca on 19 November. There was very little work at Casablanca and the teams stagnated with the 8th Evacuation Hospital until the main body arrived.

The main body sailed from New York on 28 February 1943 and landed at Casablanca on 9 March. It remained there until 20 March and then moved to Rabat in French Morocco. It stayed in Rabat till 10 May. During this time, the Second Aux deployed a good many of its teams with British hospitals, very much as the Third Aux. The only teams to go forward were those of the first detachment which had been reinforced to three general surgical teams, one orthopedic team, and two shock teams.

On 23 May, the Second Aux moved to Ain el Turck near Oran and on 4 July it moved to Constantine.

The Second Aux sent seven surgical teams to Sicily. These worked alongside the twelve Third Aux teams.

Second Aux teams landed at Salerno, Italy on D Day, 9 September 1943. They also participated in the landings at Anzio on 22 January 1944. In this operation, the Second Aux lost one officer and one enlisted man when the British hospital carrier St. David went down. On 10 February, the 33rd Field Hospital at Anzio was shelled and one of the Second Aux nurses was killed.

Second Aux teams landed with Seventh Army in southern France on D Day, 15 August, 1944. From here on, the Second Aux operated in two sections, one with Fifth Army and one with Seventh Army.

At the end of the war all the teams were recalled to Headquarters in northern Italy, and on 22 August 1945 the Group was deactivated.

The Second Aux handled a total of approximately 22,000 cases.

Abdominal cases	3,154
Thoracic cases	1,364
Thoracoabdominal cases	903
Amputations & disarticulations	1,131
Compound fractures	5,438
Cranial injuries	574
Maxillofacial	276
Vascular injuries	480
Debridements	8,680
Total	22,000

The Second Aux published its experiences in a book entitled "Forward Surgery of the Severely Wounded." This is a collection of articles dealing with the technical aspects of surgery in the field hospitals. It is a very complete work running to almost 900 pages. It is undoubtedly one of the most unusual medical documents to come out of the war.

### THE FOURTH AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP

The Fourth Aux was activated on 21 January 1943 at Lawson General Hospital in

## THE OTHER AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUPS

Atlanta, Georgia. It was under the command of Colonel H. A. Kind.

The Group sailed from New York on 7 April 1944 and arrived in England on 19 April. Soon afterwards it was attached to Third Army.

It was the Fourth Aux that furnished the teams for Detachment A and B. These teams were landed on Omaha and Utah on D plus 2. They did yeoman duty in helping the hard-pressed Third Aux teams.

Fourth Aux teams arrived in Normandy in various echelons. They functioned under Third Aux control until 19 July when Fourth Aux Headquarters arrived on the Continent. Third Army became operational on 1 August and the Fourth Aux remained with it throughout the rest of the campaign.

Two Fourth Aux teams were flown to Bastogne on 26 December. These teams landed by glider, not far from the German lines. On the same day, the 4th Armored Division broke through and the teams did little more than prepare the casualties for evacuation. Six Fourth Auxers received Silver Stars for this exploit.

Two Fourth Aux teams were attached to XVIII Airborne Corps for the cross-Rhine operation on 24 March. They landed by glider. Three Fourth Aux men were shot down as they alighted. All were killed.

The Fourth Aux statistics are not broken down according to the usual plan and it is a little difficult to compare them with those

of the other auxiliary surgical groups. The figures are as follows:

	<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Total</i>
General Surgical	8,627	8,595	17,222
Neurosurgical	836	920	1,755
Maxillofacial	1,025	1,630	2,655
Orthopedic	2,989	1,759	4,748
Thoracic	831	209	1,040
Miscellaneous	84	12	96
Total	14,391	13,125	27,516

## THE FIFTH AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP

The Fifth Aux was activated on 26 April 1944 at Fort Sam Houston under Colonel Robert Hill who was later replaced by Colonel Elmer D. Gay.

The Group arrived in England on 29 July 1944 and in France on 28 August 1944. It was then attached to Ninth Army which was active in central France. The teams saw their first action in the Brest campaign which lasted from 25 August till 20 September.

Ninth Army was then shifted to the Siegfried Line and took up position north of First Army. It entered combat in the middle of October. The Fifth Aux followed in the wake of this Army during the rest of the campaign. Some Fifth Aux teams also served with Fifth Army.

The work of the Fifth Aux has been estimated only. The figures suggest that it did approximately one-third as much field hospital surgery as the Third Aux.

Abdominal cases	1,000
Thoracic cases	1,000
Thoracoabdominal cases	300
Maxillofacial cases	2,200
Miscellaneous	10,500
Total	15,000





## Chapter XIV



### Epilogue

The Second World War was a titanic struggle. In six years of world-wide fighting, the belligerent nations mobilized nearly 100 million men and women. Of these, 15 million were killed and 6 million were disabled. The United States alone mobilized over 10 million and suffered well over a million casualties. The total cost of the war has been estimated at 1,500 billion dollars of which 300 billion was paid by Americans. Such figures transcend comprehension.

In a war that cost millions of lives and billions of dollars, the contribution of each individual becomes infinitesimal. So small, that no participant can say more than: "Yes, I was there too." Of the countless thousands who were there, very few saw the immediate result of their labors. Third Auxers were among these favored few.

The start was inauspicious. The auxiliary surgical groups were paper units when the war broke out. They were new, experimental, and anomalous. Nobody knew what to do with them. Even the planners in Washington did not have a clear idea. Consequently, many errors were made. These were errors both of judgment and of execution. Let the record speak.

In December of 1942, the Third Aux was rushed overseas to take part in an invasion that did not come off for eighteen months. There were enough surgeons in the Group to

staff a whole field army. In those days, America had only a few divisions in the field. All that was needed overseas was a small pilot force of teams to test the new ideas and prepare the ground. Such a pilot force did find its way to Tunisia. It consisted of three Third Aux and five Second Aux teams. Even in Sicily, the needs were modest. Half of one auxiliary surgical group could have carried on.

The men who stayed in England fared badly. Their training was interrupted. Their talents were fallow. Their promotions were blocked. Their presence created friction, resentment, and ill will. They were mavericks, rebels, interlopers. Without a plan for deployment or a table of equipment, they simply floundered.

It is usually held that medical units should be mobilized early so that they can spend their time in training. This may apply to hospitals but it certainly does not apply to auxiliary surgical groups. The only way to train such a group is in an operating room. There were no operating rooms for the Third Aux in England. It was very wasteful to have all these men on the ground a year and a half before they were needed.

The mobile surgical units are another example of misdirected energy. While the depots in the United States worked frantically to get the units ready, First Army in

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

England did not even know about them! This was a great pity. The units would have been a godsend on the beach. They were compact, maneuverable, and self-sufficient. As it was, supplies arrived on the beach in different echelons and at different points. One truck was no good without another. On Omaha, clearing stations waited a full three days for their equipment. The units would have filled this gap admirably. When they finally did arrive, the need for them had passed.

And yet, these errors are far outweighed by the achievements.

Foremost among these achievements was the development of a new specialty: front-line surgery. In the First World War, there had been no clear demarcation between first-priority and second-priority surgery. In the Second World War, these two categories were separated, both in time and in place.

The other innovation was to staff the first-priority hospitals with surgical teams from a pool. This was sound economy. It also was a tremendous challenge. The implicit charge to the Third Aux was: "Go forward and see what you can do for the seriously wounded." Third Auxers accepted the challenge.

The field hospitals of the Second World War were indeed unique. Nothing like them had even been seen. Here no ordinary debridesments, no simple operations, no stereotyped procedures, but only daring explorations, heroic interventions, and massive resections. The field hospital was no place for the timid. It was a place for fearless surgeons, men with imagination and indestructible self-confidence. In the Hunterian lecture before the Royal College of Surgeons on 14 June 1945, General Cutler said: "It is to the great credit of the men working

in our auxiliary surgical groups that the mortality rate in the field hospital remains as low as it is today—between 30 and 35 per cent."

The policy of assigning all first-priority surgery to one group of surgeons opened up new fields of investigation. One day in a field hospital yielded more clinical material than ten years in the average surgical practice. The Third Aux was not so prolific in capitalizing on this opportunity as the Second Aux. There were reasons. As long as the front was active, the men were too busy to write, and as soon as the war was over, the Group began to fall apart. However this may be, the accumulated experience is not lost. It will bear fruit in times to come.

In looking back over the record, one realizes that Third Auxers were privileged characters, not only professionally but in many other ways.

In the first place, they enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Before D Day, they roamed the highways and byways. After D Day, they became very busy but they could always get away for a trip to Headquarters, a visit with a nearby team, or a sight-seeing excursion. In this respect, they were far less restricted than the hospital personnel, because the platoon commander could not technically give orders to the teams. Sometimes the teams became too free. Sometimes the platoon commanders were unduly exercised. To overcome some of these difficulties, the Second Aux experimented with a scheme whereby the team leader automatically became the platoon commander. It did not work. On the whole, Third Auxers were reasonably well behaved, although some of them acquired a reputation as incorrigible free-lancers.

In the second place, Third Auxers escaped the burden of administrative work. They

## EPilogue

did not have to write reports, hold inspections, compile inventories, or account for property. The only piece of equipment that was entrusted to them was the set of surgical instruments and this had a peculiar habit of growing bigger instead of smaller. Field hospitals had their own sets. Just to be sure that they would have enough at the next stand, Third Auxers would usually expropriate a few of the hospital's items, and when they finally turned the sets in, the excess filled two pyramidal tents! The supply officer had a hard time explaining how he came by it.

In the third place, life at the front was exciting. Of course, there were many times when the men bogged down. But, compared with the islands of the South Pacific, the ETO was a three-ring circus. The constant change of scene, the contact with fresh casualties, the close-up view of foreign cultures, the opportunity to talk to intelligent people of the countries of western Europe, these things gave Third Auxers a rich emotional experience which they will remember as long as they live.

The nurses too can look back on their services with the Third Aux as one of the most rewarding periods in their lives. They shared in the grind and they share in the glory. They camped in the mud, they stood in the rain, they washed out of helmets, they slept in their foxholes, they dressed like the men, they braved all the dangers, they waived all their privileges, and they suffered more keenly under the restrictions. Yet, not a single Third Aux nurse ever asked for a transfer.

The system of assigning Third Aux nurses to the field hospitals instead of leaving them with the teams imposed an additional burden. These women were *with* the field hospital but not *of* it. Nominally, they were

Third Auxers; actually, they were field hospital nurses. Neither fish nor fowl, they were constantly teetering on that thin line that separates one unit from another. That this dual loyalty never interfered with their efficiency is an achievement in itself.

And what about the enlisted men? In an organization supercharged with temperamental surgeons, technicians are very apt to be taken for granted. They are supposed to know their jobs and ask no questions. That is the way it is in civilian life where such men can be trained over a period of years. But the men of the Third Aux did not have years. When D Day came, many of them had never seen blood. On that beach where every step was a hazard, these men faced not only their baptism of fire but also their baptism in an operating room. They came forward calmly, confidently, and steadfastly.

If the Group had needed only a small number, the record would perhaps not be so remarkable. But there were twenty-four teams to be staffed! A hundred men stepped from the confines of the training theater to the grim reality of the battlefield and not one of them faltered. They took their places with high determination. They did their work unerringly. They subordinated themselves to the welfare of others. And in so doing, they emerged as better human beings. They gave much but they received much. Their contribution is one of the brightest pages in the history of the Group.

In carrying out their mission, Third Auxers rolled up an impressive list of firsts. They were the first surgical teams to be landed by glider. They did the first surgery on three beachheads. They staffed the first hospitals in Normandy, in Belgium, in Holland, and in Germany. Their path led across

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

beaches raked by shells, through skies swept by fire, over ground punished by bombs. They marched to the sound of guns, the crash of tanks, the roar of planes. No medical men took greater risks.

They suffered casualties. One man was killed, twenty were wounded, and fifteen were captured. Those who were hurt went down with their boots on. Those who were captured met their fate with their eyes open. It could have been otherwise. The men at

Bastogne could have run for their lives. The men at Wiltz could have retreated. But they stuck to their posts. They paid the price so that others might live.

Third Auxers were front-line surgeons. But they were more than that. They were soldiers, pioneers, trail-blazers. They applied novel principles, found fresh knowledge, set new standards. Theirs is a proud record.

The Third Aux is dead. The deeds will live.



## Appendix

### Killed In Action



**Technician Fifth Grade John H. Malone**



## General Rogers awards Bronze Stars



Major Douw S. Meyers



Major Allen M. Boyden

Major John B. Peyton

Major Darrell A. Campbell

Major Marion E. Black

Major Hollis H. Brainard

Captain Sumner W. Brown

Captain Frank Merlo

Captain Sidney Simons



T4 Clarence C. Moody

T-4 Marion G. Mitcham

T-4 Thomas A. Owens

T-4 Lloyd L. Kraus





Major Alfred Hurwitz

Major Frank Wood

Major Benjamin R. Reiter

Major Reynold E. Church



Major Duncan A. Cameron

Major John A. Growdon

Major Thomas J. Floyd, Jr.

Major W. Forrester Maley



Captain John P. Sheldon

Lieutenant Virginia Heath

Lieutenant Edna M. Parker

T-4 Robert J. Smith



T-4 Asa Thomas

T-4 Aurelio M. DeLeon

T-4 Victor Nigro

T-4 Lawrence E. LeMicux

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

### PURPLE HEART AWARDS

Major James J. Whitsitt	6 June 1944	France
Major Reynold E. Church	6 June 1944	France
Major Christopher Stahler	6 June 1944	France
Captain Michael M. Donovan	6 June 1944	France
Captain William R. Ferraro	6 June 1944	France
Captain Anthony Noto	6 June 1944	France
Captain George A. Friedman	6 June 1944	France
T/4 Joseph H. Patille	6 June 1944	France
T/4 Allen E. Ray	9 June 1944	France
T/5 Emil K. Natalle	9 June 1944	France
T/5 Carl L. Heyd	24 July 1944	France
Major Albert J. Crandall	21 Sept 1944	Holland
Captain Saul Dworkin	21 Sept 1944	Holland
Captain John S. Rodda	21 Sept 1944	Holland
Captain Charles O. Van Gorder	21 Sept 1944	Holland
1st Lt. Alfred D. Sensenbach	21 Sept 1944	Belgium
1st Lt. Gladys Snyder	21 Oct 1944	Belgium
Major Evan Tansley	29 Jan 1945	Germany

## A P P E N D I X

### SILVER STAR AWARDS

By General Orders No. 2, Headquarters First Army, dated 2 January 1945, Major James M. Higginbotham was awarded the Silver Star. The citation read as follows:

Major James M. Higginbotham, 0-1696516, Third Auxiliary Surgical Group, United States Army, for gallantry in action on 6 June 1944 in France. Observing innumerable soldiers lying helplessly wounded upon the fire-swept beach on D-Day, Major Higginbotham courageously moved among the men rendering first aid while enemy shells fell dangerously about him. During an infantry attack upon the bluff, he voluntarily followed the advance to treat the wounds of the men who fell before the withering enemy fire. A fierce artillery barrage upon the bluff failed to deter this gallant officer. With undiminished daring, he went from foxhole to foxhole to carry out his heroic lifesaving medical duties. By his unflinching devotion to duty and marked valor, Major Higginbotham reflected great credit upon himself and the military service. Entered military service from Tennessee.

By General Orders No. 101, Headquarters First Army, dated 24 December 1944, Technician Fourth Grade Robert J. Smith was awarded the Silver Star. The citation read as follows:

Technician Fourth Grade Robert J. Smith, 35394832, Third Auxiliary Surgical Group, United States Army, for gallantry in action on 6 June 1944 in France. On D-Day Technician Fourth Grade Smith, amid bursting shells and exposed to incessant small arms fire, courageously assisted in carrying innumerable wounded comrades from the invasion beach through waist-deep water to a landing craft offshore. For a period of four hours he continued his hazardous duties voluntarily until every wounded soldier on the fire-swept beach had been evacuated. The heroic actions of Technician Fourth Grade Smith resulted in saving many lives and reflect great credit upon himself and the military service. Entered military service from West Virginia.

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

### LEGION OF MERIT

Colonel Joseph A. Crisler, Jr

### BRONZE STAR AWARDS

Colonel Joseph A. Crisler, Jr  
Lt. Col. Stephen J. Karpenski  
Major Marion E. Black  
Major Allen M. Boyden  
Major Howard W. Brettell  
Major Albert W. Brown  
Major Duncan A. Cameron  
Major Darrell A. Campbell  
Major Reynold E. Church  
Major Ralph R. Coffey  
Major Robert Mayo Coffey  
Major Ralph A. Dorner  
Major Francis M. Findlay  
Major Thomas J. Floyd, Jr  
Major John A. Growdon  
Major Walter G. Haynes  
Major Alfred Hurwitz  
Major Walter W. King  
Major Frank J. Lavieri  
Major John C. McClintock  
Major William F. Maley  
Major Douw S. Meyers  
Major John Bailey Peyton  
1st Lieutenant Dorothy M. Dietrich  
1st Lieutenant Virginia Heath  
1st Lieutenant Clara H. Hubbard  
T/4 Nicholas Berkich  
T/4 John S. Chobanian  
T/4 Lloyd L. Kraus  
T/4 Lawrence E. LeMieux  
T/4 Marion G. Mitcham  
T/4 Clarence C. Moody  
T/4 John L. Myers  
T/4 Victor Nigro  
T/4 Thomas A. Owens  
T/4 Cecil J. Patterson

Major Anthony T. Privitera  
Major Benjamin R. Reiter  
Major John P. Sheldon  
Major Louis M. Stoller  
Major Robert M. Sutton  
Major James J. Whitsitt  
Major H. Glenn Williams  
Major Frank Wood  
Major Glenn W. Zeiders  
Captain Hollis H. Brainard  
Captain Sumner W. Brown  
Captain Gordon A. Dodds  
Captain Michael M. Donovan  
Captain Joseph H. Hillman  
Captain Donald D. Matson  
Captain Frank Merlo  
Captain Wentworth L. Osteen  
Captain Max H. Parrott  
Captain Nathan C. Plimpton, Jr  
Captain Sidney Simons  
Captain Stanley F. Smazal  
Captain Charlotte E. Niemeyer  
  
1st Lieutenant Ruth A. Maher  
1st Lieutenant Edna M. Parker  
  
T/4 Asa Thomas  
T/4 Marvin R. Wormington  
T/5 Carl W. Hamilton  
T/5 Wilmer Meidinger  
T/5 Harold J. Meinz  
T/5 Jan Prys  
T/5 William F. Thomas  
T/5 Louis Turi  
Pvt Aurelio DeLeon

## A P P E N D I X

### DISTINGUISHED UNIT BADGE

The following teams became eligible for the Distinguished Unit Badge when the 261st Medical Battalion was cited for its work in the invasion:

Team No. 1

Team No. 2

Team No. 3

Team No. 4

Team No. 5

Team No. 6

The following teams became eligible for the Distinguished Unit Badge when the 37th Engineers Combat Battalion was cited for its work in the invasion:

Team No. 8

Team No. 11

Team No. 15

Team No. 16

The following teams became eligible for the Distinguished Unit Badge when the 149th Engineers Combat Battalion was cited for its work in the invasion:

Team No. 13

Team No. 17

Team No. 18

The following team became eligible for the Distinguished Unit Badge when the 82nd Airborne Division was cited for its work in the invasion:

Team No. 19

The following team became eligible for the Distinguished Unit Badge when the 101st Airborne Division was cited for its defense of Bastogne:

Team No. 20

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

### CROIX DE GUERRE AVEC PALME

The following teams became eligible for the *Croix de Guerre avec Palme* when the First Engineers Special Brigade was cited by the French for its work in the invasion:

Team No. 1

Team No. 3

Team No. 5

Team No. 2

Team No. 4

Team No. 6

### CROIX DE GUERRE AVEC ETOILE DE BRONZE

Technician Fourth Grade J. D. Dillard

## A P P E N D I X

### PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE THIRD AUXILIARY SURGICAL GROUP

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Interallied Conferences on War Medicine  
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**CHESTER K. BARTA**—"Peripheral Vascular Injuries in War Wounds; Their Management in Field and Evacuation Hospitals. Civilian Application in Traumatic Work"

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Section AA, p 59, 1946.  
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**DONALD D. MATSON**—"The Treatment of Acute Compound Injuries of the Spinal Cord due to Missiles"

American Lectures Series No. 23  
Charles C. Thomas, Publisher

## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

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Myron, Chester	35-37 86th St., Jackson Heights, New York
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Shepherd, Walter F.	605 West Oliver St., Owosso, Michigan
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Smith, Kenneth M.	2 North Main St., Middletown, Ohio
Snider, Oscar B.	Russellville, Kentucky
Snow, Clarence E.	1403 Butler Ave., Salt Lake City, Utah
Soderstrom, Edwin M.	1841 L St., Merced, California
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Stahler, Christopher, Jr	568 Providence St., Albany 8, New York
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Tella, Rocco A.	U. S. Veterans Hospital, Wood, Wisconsin
Tumiel, Joseph S.	549 South Park Ave., Buffalo, New York
Twarog, Walter	202 Central St., Lowell, Massachusetts
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Winslow, Philip M.	240 Alexander St., Rochester 7, New York
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## FRONT LINE SURGEONS

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Andreko, Madalyn A. ....	108 Mark Place, Kingston, Pennsylvania (Mrs. Falchek)
Armbruster, Virginia F. ....	1 Farnsworth Ave., Bordentown, New Jersey (Mrs. Beckerman)
Asselin, Mary E. ....	Star Route No. 1, Alpena, Michigan (Mrs. George H. Kaufman, Jr.)
Baker, Margaret .....	65 South Broadway, Lawrence, Massachusetts (Mrs. James P. Phelan Jr.)
Bayless, Grace V. ....	98 Brundage St., North Tonawanda, New York (Mrs. DeWitt)
Benham, Mary L. ....	Kowa General Hospital, Lawton, Oklahoma
Bernick, Eleanor E. ....	338 East Montana St., Philadelphia 19, Pennsylvania
Bestman, Florence .....	30 Chatham Ave., Pleasantville, New Jersey (Mrs. Faires)
Bigioli, Mary .....	412 Curtis Street, Salinas, California (Mrs. Espitalier)
Bisignano, Ann M. ....	R.F.D. No. 2, Medford, New Jersey
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Boone, Flonnie .....	14 Fourth Ave., N.W., Watertown, South Dakota (Mrs. James Swane)
Bovee, Irene .....	8366 American Ave., Detroit 4, Michigan
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Davis, Frances .....	Address Unknown
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\*Address probably incorrect

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## REMINISCENCES

Clifford L. Graves, M.D.

I grew up in a village in Holland where my father had retired after a career in the Dutch army. When I was 14 years old, I decided that I wanted to be a doctor.

About that time, we had a visit from a distant relative who had been to America. He wanted to sell my father's land in a faraway place called San Diego. I don't remember the sales pitch but I do remember the description: a place of milk and honey where you could go swimming the year around. I could not believe my ears. In our village you were lucky if you could go swimming once a year.

"Why don't we go?" I asked.

"Not now," said my father. "First you graduate from high school."

My wings were clipped. To soften the blow, my father bought a print of the Girl of the Golden West. She was the heroine in a Puccini opera that was popular at the time. In the full-color print she had finely chiseled features, a healthy glow, stars in her eyes, and luxuriant auburn hair that fell loosely to her shoulders. Never in my life had I seen a girl so beautiful. Compared with this divine creature, the girls I knew in school were insufferable. I paid no attention to them.

If I had read the libretto of the opera, I would have known that the girl was only an artist's conception. But I knew nothing of the story, and I asked my father where this girl came from. San Diego, he quipped. The print went on the wall of my bedroom. I was madly in love.

After what seemed like an eternity, I was graduated from high school in 1923. Meanwhile, the idea of San Diego had been discussed many times in the family circle. I had three older brothers, and they were all interested. The problem was money. My father had lost his savings in the financial debacle following the first world war. "America is the only place for us," he said.

What with money problems and visa restrictions, my father decided to let us go one at a time. After a six-month wait, my turn came up. A rich uncle gave me enough money for two years of study in the new country. I wanted to go to San Diego but my father said no. "I have a sister in New York," he said. "You can go to school there." I enrolled in the premedical program at Columbia. The girl would have to wait.

A few months before I was graduated from Columbia with a bachelor's degree, my parents arrived. They planned to go to San Diego while I finished at Columbia. On the way, they stopped in Michigan to see friends.

"Why go to California?" said the friends. "It is so far. We have a splendid university right here in Michigan." It made sense. My father bought a house in Ann Arbor, and we all converged there. A medical education now came within reach. But first, I had to earn money. That alone took three years. Finally, in 1932, I had my degree. Busy as I was, I never could get the Girl of the Golden West out of my head.

I wanted to be a surgeon, and I asked my professor for advice. "Don't go to San Diego now," he said. "They don't have a teaching hospital there. Get your training first. Then go."

For the next nine years I slaved. Theses were the years of the Depression. No time for anything but work. Still, there was San Diego. A ray of sunshine in an otherwise monastic

existence.

Just as I felt ready for the move, I got a letter. "Greetings," it said. "You are in the army now." Before I knew it I was in England with a surgical group. While awaiting the invasion, I bought a bicycle. I thoroughly enjoyed the freedom it gave me. I even went on a long bicycle tour of Europe as soon as the war was over.

Finally, it was time for San Diego. In a mood to celebrate, I decided to fly to Los Angeles and ride my bicycle from there. Progress was smooth and pleasant. Halfway down the coast, I switched inland to El Camino Real. In those days it was a little country road, winding through the foothills. I became more and more excited.

Ten miles from my goal, as it was getting dark, I had a flat. Damnation! In my haste to get away, I had forgotten the tire repair kit. The road was deserted. I had no choice but to walk.

Soon it was dark. I was getting hungry. Not only hungry but thirsty, tired and utterly frustrated, all at the same time. The only thing that kept me going was the vision of San Diego and — who could tell? — The Girl. I was heading for my destiny.

At last I saw a light. It came from a truck stop at a place we used to call La Jolla junction. Today, it had been swallowed up by the campus. I staggered up the last of the grade and leaned my bicycle against the wall. I was at the end of a 25-year search.

I pushed the door open. Two truck drivers were at the counter. Behind the counter was a fat woman with a dirty apron and a look of boredom. Hard as nails and sour as a lemon, she could not even spare me a smile. All of a sudden I felt drained.

"What do you want?" she snarled, giving the counter a vicious wipe.

"Just let me have a cup of coffee," I sighed.

The next morning I woke up in a bed in La Valencia Hotel. My room faced the ocean, and I looked down on the Cove and an incredibly blue ocean. Paradise! Why go on to San Diego? La Jolla had everything anyone could desire. It was September 1945.

But could I make a living here as a surgeon? For the next few days I made it a point to talk to every doctor I could find. As far as I can remember, there were eight or nine. The oldest was Dr. Dieffenbach who had taken on a younger man, Dr. Helming. Next to Dieffenbach who was *then* in his late 50s was Dr. Chalmers who officed with Fred Ullrich. Dr. Lipe was a younger man who had been in La Jolla since 1937. In the same age group as Lipe were Drs. Corbin and Neber. At the hospital were Dr. Uncapher in radiology, Dr. Hartley in the laboratory, and Dr. Garth in anesthesia. Scripps Clinic, next door to the hospital, had Drs. Sherrill, Copp, Smith, Calloway, Lambert and McKay. These were not in private practice, however. In Pacific Beach I found the Mitchell brothers and Marion De Weese. There may have been a few others.

I asked them all the same question, and I got the same

answers. La Jolla is too small for a full-time surgeon. Better go somewhere else. I was crushed.

I soon found out that most of the surgical work at Scripps Hospital was done by Dr. Hall Holder who had lived in La Jolla since 1927. He had tried a part-time office in La Jolla but without success. His office was in San Diego where I looked him up. He received me most cordially, even though I was a potential competitor. La Jolla is too small for a full-time surgeon, he said, but you could come in with me, and we could share the work. I accepted with alacrity. Our association lasted seven years. In 1952 I established my office in La Jolla, and Dr. Holder stayed in San Diego.

The first job of a new doctor is to make friends with the other doctors and get their confidence. I had to sell myself. What I needed was a few spectacular operations. They weren't long in coming.

"Come quick to the emergency room," was the message on the telephone. "They have a patient there who has been shot."

I hurried over. An extraordinary sight greeted me as I entered. Stretched out on a gurney was a patient. Out of his chest protruded a three-foot spear which pulsated alarmingly with every heart beat. Steadyng the spear with both hands was the man responsible for this mayhem. The two had been scuba diving off the Cove, each diver armed with an underwater gun. These underwater guns were very popular at the time, and they could kill a shark at ten feet. While hunting, buddy number one had mistaken buddy number two for a shark. Zap!

The casualty looked me straight in the eye. "Is this spear going to kill me?" was the unspoken question. I determined that the spear had penetrated the chest for about two inches, directly over the heart. And yet, there were no signs of a catastrophe. Pulse and breathing were normal. I tried to remove the spear by tugging on it. Impossible. It had a barbed end. I said a few reassuring words but they sounded hollow. I was now confronted with an extremely precarious situation.

If I tried to remove the spear by pulling on it, there was a chance of further damage which I could not control without the preliminary opening of the chest cavity. On the other hand, if I opened the chest with the spear in place, I would have a contaminated field with a great chance that the spear would cause further damage. Either way, a surgeon could be criticized for doing what he did. It was a no-win situation.

We prepared the patient for operation in case that would become necessary. Put the patient under, I said to Dr. Garth who had meanwhile been summoned. I pulled on the spear. It would not budge. I pulled with all my might. The spear came away. I waited for signs of an internal catastrophe. None developed. In a few minutes, Dr. Garth let the patient wake up. He put his hand on his chest. The spear was gone. He grabbed my hand. "Thank God," he murmured. Yes, it was God who saved him.

In my years at Bellevue Hospital in New York, I had taken a special interest in surgery of the chest. Among the diseases that we saw a lot of at Bellevue were lung abscess and bronchiectasis. So when I arrived in La Jolla, I was all ready to work on patients with lung abscess and bronchiectasis. Alas — I never saw one. Lung abscess and bronchiectasis are the result of poor sanitary conditions and a harsh climate. Who could have known that La Jolla does not have poor conditions and a harsh climate? Write it off to seapage and leakage.

In the midst of getting my feet on the ground, I had a call from a doctor in Ocean Beach. "I have just seen a six-year-old boy with a patent ductus arteriosus," he said. "and I would like to send him to you." The ductus arteriosus is an abnormal connection between two large blood vessels near the heart. It is supposed to function only during fetal life. If it fails to close at birth, it acts as a bypass for blood that is supposed to go somewhere else. The effect is that of a leaky valve. The first operation for patent ductus arteriosus had been done by Dr. Gross in Boston in 1939. This work came to a standstill during the war. In 1945 in San Diego, no operations for patent ductus had as yet been done.

After confirming the diagnosis, I decided to go ahead with the operation. At the last moment I discovered that the hospital did not have the Finocchietto rib spreader without which this operation would be impossible. I called a surgical supply store in Los Angeles. Yes, they had the instrument but they had no delivery service. If I needed it the next day, I would have to pick it up myself. I started at three in the afternoon.

Everything went according to schedule until I had to drive back to La Jolla. It was now about seven in the evening, and a heavy fog rolled in. I tried to get my bearings from landmarks that I had seen on the way in. But the service station I distinctly remembered had dissolved in the murk. All night I drove through the streets of Los Angeles, looking for an out. Finally at three in the morning, the fog lifted. Where am I? In Pasadena. It was nearly eight when I got back to La Jolla.

Here I found the operating room in an uproar. News of the scheduled operation had spread, and a dozen doctors from San Diego had come to watch it. In an effort to allay ruffled feathers, I introduced myself and the entire operating room staff to the visitors. The scrub nurse, the instrument nurse, the circulating nurse, all the way down to the clean-up woman who was especially unhappy because of all the extra work that had been heaped on her.

"And this is Mary, our factotum," I said.

Mary gave me a withering look and snapped back, "Well, I have been called a lot of things in my life but never a factotum."

In spite of this poor start, the operation went well and everybody went home happy.

Although La Jolla did not have any patients with lung abscess or bronchiectasis, it did have a lot of patients with stomach ulcers. As luck would have it, a new operation for ulcer had just been developed by Dr. Dragstedt in Chicago. This operation consists of cutting the vagus nerve. Without the vagus, the stomach stops pouring out acid and the ulcer heals. A patient with an ulcer is not happy because he is reminded of his ulcer every time his stomach is without food to neutralize the acid. After the vagotomy, all pain would disappear. I had done a number of vagotomies before I discovered that a vagotomy alone is not enough. You have to do a drainage operation in addition. Today, it is rarely necessary to operate for ulcer because of a new drug, Tagamet.

But things did not always go smoothly. One evening, just as I was getting ready for bed, I had a call from a doctor in Chula Vista. "I have a patient here in the hospital with hic-

cups," he said. "We tried everything. Can you come over and see him?" In the days before the freeway, to drive from La Jolla to Chula Vista took nearly an hour. Nevertheless, I said that I would be right over.

At the hospital, I found that the patient was a 70-year-old man who had been recovering nicely from a prostatectomy until the hiccups which had plagued him non-stop for four days. The standard treatment for refractory hiccups is an injection of the phrenic nerve in the neck. We tried to figure out which side and decided on the left. I injected the nerve with novocaine. The hiccups stopped. I waited half an hour and drove home.

I had just walked through the door when the doctor called again. "The patient is hiccupping again." I drove back. The left side of his diaphragm was resting up, but the right side was raising Cain. I injected the right side, waited an hour, and drove home.

You guessed it. As soon as I was home, the doctor called with the dismal news. More hiccups. Back I went in the early morning. This time I crushed the nerve lightly through a small incision under local anesthesia on the left. The hiccups stopped. With bated breath, I drove home. I could have saved myself the trouble. The message was waiting for me at home: more hiccups. Enough of this nonsense, I said. I'll crush his phrenic on the right. So done. The hiccups stopped for good. I billed the patient for two hundred dollars plus gas and oil for 160 miles of driving. He thought it was a good bargain. It was.

In these early days, I got much help from the doctor in charge of the x-ray department, Rex Uncapher, and also from the doctor in charge of the laboratory, George Hartley. I needed both of them when a patient with a spot on the lung was referred to me. Clinically it was cancer. But I had to prove it before I could operate. At Bellevue Hospital I had experimented with needle biopsy. A biopsy is the removal of a bit of tissue for microscopic examination. Sometimes you can get the sample through a needle but that is not easy in the lung where the structures are constantly moving. I needed Dr. Uncapher to tell me where my needle was going, and I needed Dr. Hartley to examine the tiny bit of tissue in the needle. Beginner's luck. The diagnosis was confirmed, and the patient recovered after his operation. This was the first time in San Diego that needle biopsy was used in the diagnosis of cancer of the lung.

Another first came a little later. A patient was brought in with a traumatic amputation of both legs at the knees. This man was a telephone linesman who had been caught at knee level by a cable from a fixed point to a moving bus. The situation was such that the cable stopped the bus while sawing through the man's legs. One leg was beyond salvage but in the other I was able to unite the blood vessels and the nerves while an orthopedist did what he could with the bones. Today this patient walks almost normally with an artificial leg on one side and his reconstructed leg on the other.

La Jolla in 1945 was just as beautiful as it is today but it did not look the same. The largest building in town was Iller's department store which eventually became Walker Scott. Of traffic there was very little. I remember running into Roger Revelle at the corner of Pearl and La Jolla Boulevard. He was in his car, and I was in mine. He was doing a mathematical problem, and I was worrying about my next operation. We parted amicably.

Historians divide history into four periods: ancient, the Dark

Ages, the Middle Ages, and modern. La Jolla has an ancient history but we don't know much about it. The Dark Ages started in 1887 with the building of the first cottages. The Middle Ages run from 1920 till 1945. After that, it is modern history. Why do I choose these dates? The year 1920 is significant because by that time La Jolla had paved streets, running water, and electricity. But it did not have car pollution and people pollution. That is why I consider the decade of the 1920s the best time for La Jollans. Too bad that they did not know it.

In 1950 I finished my book *Front Line Surgeons*. It describes the experiences in the field hospitals in Europe. To celebrate the event, I took two months off for a bicycle tour of Europe. On my return, I was urged to start a bicycle club. But when I looked around, I found out that there were no bicycle riders in La Jolla except for a few youngsters. With considerable misgivings, I put an announcement in the *La Jolla Light* that I would lead a bicycle ride to Borrego on Saturday and return on Sunday. Fourteen boys and girls showed up, including Steele Lipe, Dr. Lipe's 12-year-old son. There was only one other adult: Joe Merrill who proved to be a godsend because he was a far more experienced rider than I was. Flawed though it was, this weekend ride to Borrego was so enjoyable that I decided to build a club. It grew, at first ever so slowly, then with increasing momentum. I led many bicycle tours in my 18 years as president, including several to Europe. One of the great rewards in my life was the close association with these bright and energetic youngsters. I started teaching them, and before long they were teaching me. In 1960 the club acquired a bus through the generosity of the La Jolla Rotary Club. It is still in use.

In 1954 I had a visit from Peter Nicoloff, a Bulgarian violinist who had just come here with his wife, the former Elizabeth Hastings of Pasadena. Peter wanted to start an orchestra. We did some exploring and discovered that La Jolla had many musicians capable of playing in a symphony. What we needed was a formal structure to raise funds. That is how the La Jolla Symphony got started. I functioned as president for eight years. At first the concerts were given in the high school auditorium. Later, with the building of Sherwood Hall in 1960, they shifted there.

During these years La Jolla had the Musical Arts organization which put on concerts during the summer. The Musical Arts concerts were under the direction of Nicolai Sokoloff. But the Musical Arts was essentially an imported orchestra of professionals from Los Angeles. The La Jolla Symphony was homegrown and for non-professionals. With the death of Nicolai Sokoloff in the early 60s, the Musical Arts was discontinued.

The La Jolla Symphony steamed ahead. In 1960, a youth talent competition got under way. These competitions have brought some fine young musicians to light. I am thinking of Gregory Allen, now a concert pianist of international reputation who won the Rubinstein competition in Tel Aviv a few years ago. Another, more recently, was David Korevaar who won the Rockefeller competition for pianists in 1985. There were others but not of the same stature.

In 1966 Peter Nicoloff retired. He was succeeded by Thomas

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Nee of the Music Department at the University of California here in La Jolla. At the same time, Pat Smith founded a choral group to work with the orchestra. Today the concerts are given four or five times a year in the Mandeville Auditorium on the campus. The orchestra is a full size symphony with musicians who are divided nearly equally between town and gown. La Jolla can well be proud of its musical life.

In 1964 I had a visit from a French couple who had ridden their tandem from Vancouver to San Diego. This visit set me to thinking. If a middle-aged couple from France could travel halfway around the world to go cycling in California, there must be others. I asked the Nogrettes if they would return the following year for a tour of New England with a group that I promised to put together. I recruited through the few magazines that existed at the time. After a whole year of preparation, the tour came off with a group of 40 people, ranging in age from 25 to 75. This was the first time in the U.S. since about 1900 that an organized bicycle tour for adults took to the road. This first bicycle tour led directly to the formation of the International Bicycle Touring Society of which I have been president

since its beginning. Over all these years, we have organized about 250 tours in various countries. Of course, I did not go on all of them.

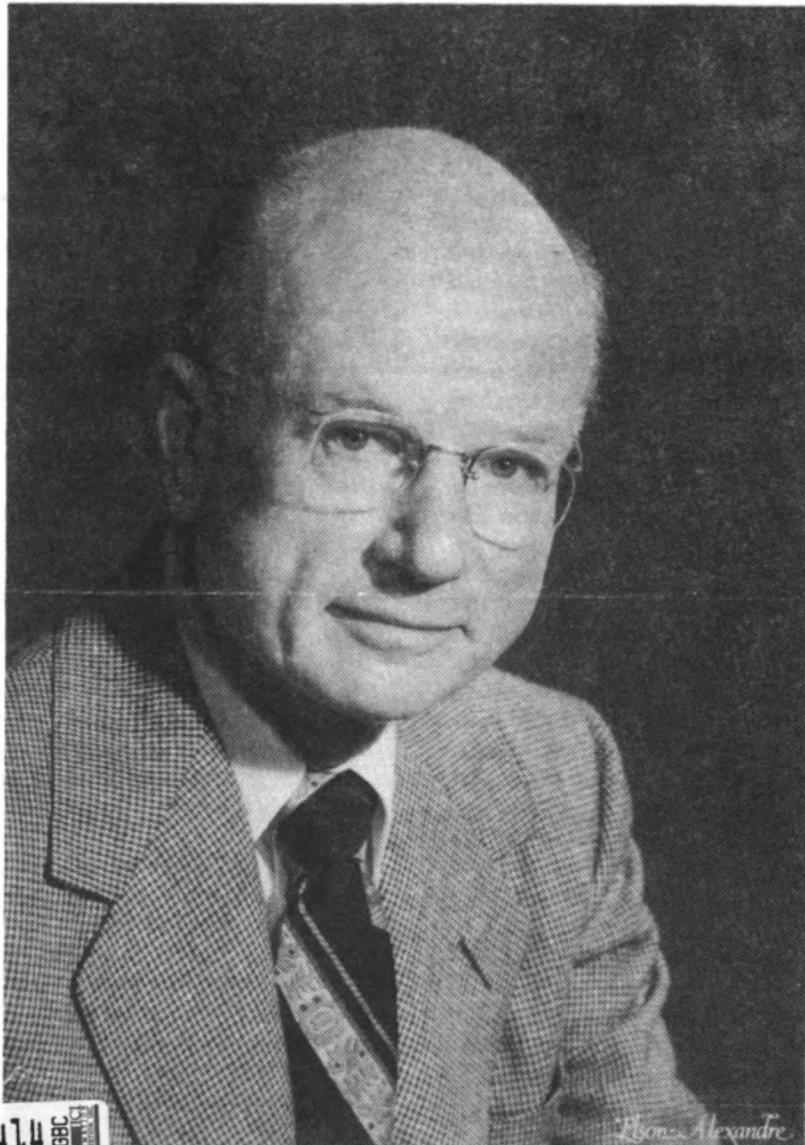
In 1978, when I turned 72, I retired and at the same time married my long-time sweetheart Catherine. This was the best thing I ever did. Catherine shared my enthusiasms and helped with the tours.

In 1981 she suggested that we take our bicycles to China for a tour. Well, why not? We flew to Peking and were just about to start when we discovered that China takes a dim view of freelance travel, especially by bicyclists. Too many skeletons. We escaped official attention by riding away from the airport while nobody was looking. In this fashion we covered about 1000 miles by bicycle and 3500 miles by air in two months. It was the ultimate travel adventure.

I've now come to the end of my life, and my death is not far away. Farewell to all my friends.

La Jolla, California  
October, 1985

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